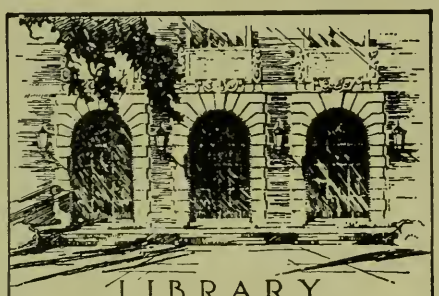
A Woman's Love-Lesson

Emily J. Dunham



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A WOMAN'S LOVE-LESSON.

VOL. II.

A WOMAN'S LOVE-LESSON

BY

EMILY J. DUNHAM

'Experience, like a pale musician, holds
A dulcimer of patience in his hand,
Whence harmonies we cannot understand,
Of God's will in His worlds, the strain unfolds
In sad, perplexëd minors.'

E. B. BROWNING.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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A WOMAN'S LOVE-LESSON.

CHAPTER I.

One morning in July Barbara Morne wanted to write, but the spirit did not move her.

She sat before a desk upon the sloping front of which had rested the pages of those MSS. which had brought her literary success; her writings were, it is true, more successful than literary, but as she had never doubted her own ability to write infinitely better if she chose, this fact did not limit her self-respect. She had learned

to regard that desk as essential to her when she desired to work, having that superstitious belief in its value which some persons attach to china animals, horseshoes, or other fetiches. But to-day the spell of the desk failed; she could not pen two satisfactory sentences consecutively.

Brilliant sunshine was flooding the room, —the drawing-room to which Anna and Mr. Broughton had been shown on the occasion of their visit,—and flowers, lovingly gathered by Miss Hilda, adorned the vases on the tables and mantelshelf. On the open piano-stand stood another of Basil's patriotic songs. From somewhere out-of-doors came the sound of an old-fashioned dignified love-ditty, but the voice which sang was that of a woman.

Barbara was used to hearing both the air and the tremulous mezzo-soprano, and

thought, with a sigh half of weariness, half of annoyance, that Miss Hilda was lucky in having nothing better to do than to sit among the flowers and warble.

Sometimes Barbara reeled off a wonderful number of written pages in an hour, sometimes she worked with more conscious skilfulness, but seldom did her powers desert her as they had done now.

Having tried to begin a new story without thinking out the ramifications of its plot, she next threw her pen down impatiently, and began to weave incidents together in her mind. Instead of taking the necessary keen interest in the characters she had imagined, she found that she was considering the incidents of lives she had known,—her own to begin with, then Basil's, then Anna's. Her meditations, which were personal, introduced the

name of a man not as yet mentioned in these pages; and when Barbara realised that her thoughts had been with him, she found that she had bitten her wooden pen-holder down an inch.

Meanwhile Miss Hilda continued to carol happily about 'loves' and 'doves,' 'flowers' and 'hours,' 'eyes' and 'sighs.'

Anger possessed Barbara's soul after a while; she longed to put her head out of the window and command the singer to be silent; but this was one of the many longings she did not gratify. Of some dogs has it been said that the bark was worse than the bite, and with Barbara a detestably disagreeable desire often ended in an amiable action.

Personal tidiness was not one of her virtues. She was wearing a loose morning-gown, and her dark hair had been twisted

up carelessly. The ubiquitous theatre-shoes were crossed on a foot-stool under the table, her feet had slipped out of them and were hidden by the train of her robe. When the sunshine fell full upon her it showed a fretful eagerness of expression in her little oval face.

For three days Barbara had been left to her own society; for her uncle's she avoided, and Miss Hilda's was not worth counting. Anna Broughton was in some trouble; she had written a letter to ask her dear friend not to be offended if she did not see her for awhile, as 'home affairs' were in confusion.

'To think that I came down to this hole of a place to do good to other people,' thought Barbara, 'and now they throw me over.'

Then she told herself that this treat-

ment typified the usual reward of self-sacrifice,—and felt better for the reflection. From pessimism to cynicism is but a step; so Basil might have lived to disown his belief that his sister, though cynical in her novels, was not so in soul, had he not come in from a walk in time to rescue her from unprofitable meditations.

'Oh, dear boy, I bless the sight of you!'

'Bab, I can't return the compliment. You don't look nice at all.'

She laughed, bent to reach the slippers, and, after putting them on, got up.

'Give me a yellow rose from that table; there,—now another;—one in my hair, another in my girdle!—now am I not "nice"?—I've become picturesque instead of slatternly!'

He laughed, as she had meant him to

do, and, arm-in-arm, they passed out into the garden.

Miss Hilda, from her nook among the roses and larkspurs, saw them and smiled. It was an undecided question in her heart whether Barbara or Basil were the better member of humanity; the one was 'a sweet creature,' the other 'such a grand kind of a man!'

When the brother and sister reached the end of the lawn, they were speaking of Anna.

'I saw her in the village,' he was saying. 'She crossed the road to speak to me.'

Barbara's bright eyes lost the significance of an expression on her brother's face, and her comprehension embraced all the aspects of the anecdote he told her.

She almost saw the meeting,—Anna, crossing the road, bearing herself with what might be described as impetuous dignity; and Basil, outwardly polite, in reality cautious, greeting her with his most ordinary manner. For Basil reserved his *extraordinary* manners for his sister, showing her his natural enthusiasms, letting her see how deep was his pride in himself, how exultant he was in his own powers. —There was a reason why he felt mentally on the defensive when speaking with an attractive woman; female prettiness had no charm for him, but once he let himself become deeply interested in a female mind, there was no telling how soon he might regard her too favourably. And, though he thought well of womankind, he had no wish to love a woman.

'She crossed the road to speak to you,—

well? I want to hear the rest of the story.'

'It is simple. She said, "How do you do?" then began to make excuses for having written you that letter; explaining that her brother has cast off the parental yoke and departed to seek fresh fields and pastures in London.'

'Basil, she did not make use of those words.'

'No.'

'What a tiresome fellow you can be when you choose. I want to know how she looked.'

Mr. Morne sat down on a garden-seat, gently pulled his sister down beside him, and answered her caressingly.

'Dear girl, we aren't quite able, either of us, to understand Miss Anna's moods and expressions. I expected to find her

a bread-and-butter miss, fit for a rectory, but she is more than that. I'm not even sure that the rectory suits her at all as a background.'

'Do you mean to say that we, with our experiences of life, are unable to ticket and classify the emotions of any creature? Basil, I'm offended. Granted that human nature isn't worth studying, yet I do think . . .'

'Be quiet, Bab.'

'Really, sir!'

'Don't talk cynicism to me.'

'If you aren't a cynic, you ought to be.'

'Not while there are good women in the world.'

'But you often say that half their goodness is habit, and the other half humbug.'

'That doesn't make it any less good. No, Bab, you won't persuade me to join in the pessimist wail yet. Human nature's a glorious possession, a glorious brotherhood, and only exceptional trials make it unworthy. Considering how much misery there is, it's a marvel that men and women are so admirable.'

Barbara shrugged her shoulders.

'It always vexes me that we don't agree, but I've not had your training, old boy.'

'You're talking about Nellie?'

'Yes.' She looked in his face quickly, as though searching for something not there. 'If you weren't one of the oddest fellows living, you wouldn't let me talk about her.'

His eyes were giving wandering glances over the garden. Barbara, used to detail-

ing changes of expression in the faces of heroes, found her ingenuity at a loss now. There was a gloom, a shadow over this face, but she could not decide where it lingered; not on the lips, not, noticeably, in the restless eyes. A minute later he glanced back at her with a smile.

'Don't try to dissect me, Bab; it was partly to spare you the task that I told you of my trouble, in those early days when it was still fresh. Of course I am getting over it now; you needn't expect to see me turn pale, become wrinkled, etc., etc., after the manner of the orthodox lover of your novels; so long as I don't risk falling in love with another woman, I'm all right. Poor Nell's a pleasant memory, and I've reason to be grateful to her; losing her made me ambitious. If a man has domestic happiness, success in the

world is his second interest only, not his first.'

'That sounds abominably selfish somehow! Of course, *I'm* fond of you, old boy. If Anna were, she would make your soul the subject of daily prayer; and yet you're good, in *your* way. That's where the irony of goodness comes in. The people who have got all kinds of religious crutches and supports don't often walk as straight or as steadily as some do with no strength but themselves.'

'You are thinking of Chester.'

'He was an instance. There's another example of the irony of fate, in the fact that I, who am willing to love, can't find anyone worth loving; and you, who don't mean to take the risk again, have to be continually on your guard, for fear you might be caught unawares.'

Basil laughed.

'Poor Bab! You should not be so cynical, my dear, trust a little more; don't search for bad points in men as you would for the specks in an apple. You contrive to trust me.'

'Because I know the worst of you.'

'Don't ever believe you know the worst of a man who is ambitious!—By-the-by, we usually indulge in this sort of conversation, don't we, Bab?'

'The present one was introduced by Anna. So you don't know what to make of her, Basil?'

'She seems to be a composite character, and I am not a thought-reader. You asked me how she looked? If she was in sincere distress of mind she was not too much absorbed to be a trifle shy of me; if she was bent upon being dignified,

conscious of eyes at all the cottage windows, she was very impulsive. She sent her love to you; became mysterious when alluding to the crimes of brother Richard, blushed hotly when owning that her father had been obliged to turn the young man out of doors. Did you ever fancy that your friendship comes between her and her conscience?'

'Our friendship makes her see that the order of her home life is ridiculous. I want to enlighten her ignorance; she will be spoiled soon if no one rouses her.'

'Why are you going to take so much trouble, Miss Cynic?'

Barbara could not invent an answer until she had thought for a moment.

'Oh, because . . . because I want to benefit humanity. You are always talking about the beauty of human nature in the

mass, and why should not I love it in an example?'

'It is not quite like you.'

'I don't mean my friend to be sacrificed to a domesticated curate.'

'Is that her probable fate?'

'He is an odious little man, who divides his interest between the Young Men's Christian Association and the babies in his own nursery. I don't suppose he has an idea beyond a soup-ticket or a mustard-plaster.'

'Certainly Anna would make a good wife, under favourable circumstances.'

'You have seen her possibilities, though you don't understand her expressions?'

'I am not blind. Indeed, I should like to study her—but you know, Bab, that I have resolved never again to study a woman's character. I studied Nell's

so carefully that, when she died, I wanted to die too—I who am as robust as a man can be. That was ridiculous, of course; weak, contemptible. No other woman shall ever make me weak if I can help it.—Now, tell me about your writing. Why didn't it get on well to-day?'

'Frankly, I felt in a bad temper. Country life doesn't agree with me.'

'Why stay here, then? Let me take you back to town.'

'No,' said Barbara.

She was thinking that her own plans were indescribably absurd; was she not planning the loss, to another woman, of the brother who was her confidant, her own possession? Until she had found the husband she was seeking, it was madness, surely, which made her scheme to get Basil married?

'And I'm supposed to be a cynic!' she said to herself, contemptuously. 'I can't even be cynical in a nice, whole-hearted manner. I'm doomed to be a fraud, somehow!'

Confounded by this discovery that her knowledge of herself was opposed to her theories—that, depreciate human nature as she would, her own nature remained fundamentally good, Barbara gave an odd little laugh of mortification. Why could she not find a husband as honest as she was herself? Why could she not believe in the honesty of the unnamed man who was so often in her thoughts? Why, above all, did the unnamed man hesitate to trust *her?*

'He thinks me selfish!' she reflected, bitterly; 'and I'm about the most unselfish creature living! If I were not, should I

be glad that Basil is afraid of Anna?'

By telling Anna that Basil was not happy, Barbara had suppled her dear friend with ample food for reflection during lonely hours, and meant to press it upon her a great deal more in conversation. But, while the conversation would have to be explicit, the intimation had been effectively vague. Barbara knew that an insinuation often does more work than a downright statement, and that a halo of romance suits a handsome man.

Poor Nellie still played an important part in Basil Morne's fortunes.

'I'll go and seen Anna this afternoon,' said Bab aloud. 'If I leave her to her father and the curate, she will make a silly of herself.'

But for once Miss Morne made a mistake. Her wiser course would have been to have

let Anna alone, until she had begun to feel the need of sympathy.

Miss Broughton was busy when her friend invaded the rectory,—busy over the preparation of needlework for the young women of her Class. Her mind was influenced by her occupation; as she planned and cut the calicoes into garments she thought of the girls for whom they were intended, remembering that they preferred cheap lace trimming to the excellence of many tucks, and that Mattie always scalloped her flannel petticoats with pale blue silk.

Barbara rushed in, unannounced.

'You poor dear captive! I've come to cheer you over your endless tasks. Basil said you were looking dreary.'

Anna kissed her friend, gave her an arm-chair, begged her to take her hat off

but betrayed neither excitement nor delight at the unexpected visit. Her eyes were very grave, as, standing erect, scissors in hand, by the calico-strewn table, she watched Barbara.

'It was very kind of you to think of coming to cheer me,' she answered, in that prim, even-toned voice which her Class knew well, but which Barbara had never heard before. 'Mr. Morne asked what was the matter with us, at home here, and I tried to explain a little; but it is not easy to tell a stranger one's family troubles.'

'Stranger? My darling girl, aren't we more than that to you?'

Anna looked perplexed. Truth and politeness were fighting for mastery over her.

'You forget, I think, that I have only met Mr. Morne twice.'

'Oh, but we're free-and-easy folk! So all the worry is about your brother?'

Anna's face grew very stern, and she went on cutting out the garments; the sharp snap of the scissors emphasising her words.

'Richard has behaved very badly. Father was obliged to send him away.'

'What has he done?'

Barbara was inquisitive by nature; she asked the question sharply, because she was vexed to find Anna not easily influenced. Swinging her feet,—not much better shod now, in down-at-heel walking-shoes—resting both elbows on the edge of the table and her chin on her hands, she repeated the inquiry.

'What has he done? What is all the fuss about?'

Anna, who had not expected to be questioned, coloured.

'He . . . he has always been wild, and now . . . he has got engaged to a girl who is . . .'

'Disreputable?'

'Not exactly, but of low birth.'

'That is nothing now-a-days, but of course your father has old-fashioned notions.'

'We think it very distressing.'

'I'm dreadfully sorry for you, dear, but young men will be young men, you know; if his father had taken no notice he would probably have jilted the girl of his own accord.'

And this was all the sympathy Barbara offered. She sat a long while in Anna's work-room, chatting upon frivolous sub-

jects, trying to turn her friend's thoughts into worldly channels; but Miss Broughton, working for her Class, could not be persuaded to forget the delinquencies of her brother Richard, the defiance of Purvis, or the impertinent prettiness of an unmentioned young woman.

The truth was that Richard's example had made his sister cling all the more firmly to the safe principles, beliefs, and innocent prejudices in which she had been instructed from her earliest years; his defection from duty made her all the more dutiful, his disregard for the rector's warnings had taught her to respect them as most wise.

And the principal warnings Mr. Broughton had given his daughter had been connected with 'those worldlings,' Barbara and Basil Morne.

So Barbara, by being worldly, shocked Anna to-day, whereas yesterday she would have pleased her.

And that afternoon, Anna, when tidying her bedroom, came across the novel which had affected her so powerfully, and locked it safely away, without as much as glancing at a page.

CHAPTER II.

Richard Broughton had left Maycross without having said good-bye to anyone but his mother. To Philip Hedworth he had sent a short note from London, merely announcing his arrival in town, and expressing a genuine hope that the curate 'wouldn't forget their friendship.' Neither, in his excitement, had Richard neglected to send his love to Trot and Jerry. It could not be said of this prodigal that he forgot his friends.

When Maycross had discussed his de-

parture sufficiently, there were few people who thought much about him. The girls of Anna's class whispered among themselves about the rectory tragedy; for such the son's banishment appeared to simple country folk: Kate Ruggles and her mother obtained every item of information possible concerning it, but still it interested them all more because of its relation to Miss Anna and the rector than for Dick's own sake. Kate knew that Mattie and Dick were engaged—a result of her own manœuvring she thought this, but Mattie had grown remarkably reticent. Since the departure of her betrothed she had scarcely spoken his name, even to her confidant of old days, Kate, but went about with her face full of mysterious sadness.

Mattie heard from Dick constantly, unknown to her father; though it is probable

that the captain guessed that a love-affair was being carried on between his only daughter and the rector's son, and was well-satisfied that this should be; as it was one other way of humiliating the rector, against whom he had a spite. Mrs. Drinkwater knew of these letters, for she received them for her god-child. Often she would sit chuckling by her window, holding one of the letters face downwards on her lap; her satisfactions were of a refined description, for when she saw Mr. Broughton walk past, within a yard of his son's epistle to Purvis's daughter, the old dame would throw herself back in her chair and go into a transport of subdued laughter.

'Good-morning, parson,' she would call after him, obliging him to raise his hat and answer,—when he would wonder at the note of jubilation in her voice, setting it

down as due to her sympathy with Socialist defiance.

Philip Hedworth was the one man of the village who regretted the going of Dick Broughton.

Had not the curate confided to Anna's brother the secret, which was no secret, of his love for Anna herself? Philip, in his friend's absence, remained true to him, at great loss of the rector's approval. Since the night when the curate had kept silence as to Richard's whereabouts, he had not been treated well at the rectory.

Anna looked indignantly at him, showing a cold dignity of manner to which he was not used, and her father had snubbed his efforts at familiar conversation, only addressing him upon business matters, and then severely.

But one day, not long after Richard's

going, Philip found Mrs. Broughton in her wheel-chair in the garden. She beckoned to him, and he crossed the lawn at once; seating himself on a low bench against the wooden wall of a shed. He was in shadow, but she was enjoying the warmth of the sunshine; and he noticed, feeling a sudden shock of apprehension, how transparent was her pale skin. She looked older, more feeble; but he hoped that he was deceived by some unusual effect of light, having seldom seen her out of her own room.

'My husband is out,' she said, hurriedly, and looking round, as though expecting some interruption; 'and I . . . I wanted to have a talk with you.'

The curate, with his simple face and grey-blue eyes, turned towards her and smiled.

'Oh, you know!' cried little Mrs. Broughton; 'I see that you know what I mean. What do *you* think of it all? Is it really Mattie Purvis? And is she vulgar, as I am told? And does she care for him truly?'

'As far as I know she is a good-hearted girl, and sincerely attached to Dick . . . to Richard, I mean.'

'Oh, call him Dick; I like to hear it. And he was always praising you, and you spoke up for him to his father. It was kind of you.'

'I have displeased the rector,' said Philip, 'but I cannot help holding the opinion firmly that Dick ought not to have been sent away without a home to go to, or any work to do. My opinion may be wrong, but I must be true to it; and you, dear lady, will at least sympathise with my reasons.'

'I do more, I share it. Oh, Mr. Hedworth, you don't think any harm will come to my boy in London? He has found a lodging, for he gives an address in his letter.'

'I did not know he had written home.'

The little woman clasped her hands together quickly, and gave an exclamation.

'Oh . . . I . . .'

She paused; her frightened eyes met the grave eyes of Philip, and she blushed with confusion at having been caught in an act of deception.

'I got a letter from him by the early post this morning; Jane kept it for me, and did not put it in the breakfast-room. I hope it is not very wrong of me not to have told my husband, but I did not wish to anger him, and . . . after all, if my boy may not write to his mother, to whom

may he write? Besides, a mother has her duty, she can't lay it down—she can't give up her son!'

The mother-spirit, once roused, did not die out at once, but burned in Mrs. Broughton's face, illuminating it into beauty. Philip Hedworth felt a new reverence for her as he bowed his head in response.

'You are right. Dick will carry the thought of your affection with him wherever he goes; it cannot fail to help him live his life well and honestly. When he writes to me, I will tell you.'

'And I will tell you when I hear . . . Mr. Hedworth, you have a son of your own; think how you would feel if Jerry were away from home, and with a sorrow hanging over him?'

Philip became thoughtful; the sugges-

tion Mrs. Broughton had made was a difficult one to follow; how could he believe that his tiny Jerry would ever fall in love with a woman?—unless, indeed, he fell in love with Anna, his second mother. The train of ideas grew,—he began to fancy how kind Anna would be to his two little ones,—then wondered whether Mrs. Broughton would care for himself as a son?

Before their talk was over Philip had told his hopes to Anna's mother, and received her good wishes.

'She is a good girl, I know; so very domesticated, and a great help to her father. Oh, I hope she will make you very happy . . . Philip!'

His own Christian name, spoken with a gentle hesitancy, fell pleasantly on the curate's ears. It was long since a wo-

man's voice had used it with that accent; his sister Grace usually called him 'brother,' but in any case her tones were not tender.

'Will you not speak to Anna to-day?' Mrs. Broughton asked before they parted.

'I am a coward,' said Philip. 'I feel that I dare not. Yet the question must be asked and answered some day. Would it be better for me to speak first to the rector?'

'There can be no need. I know he will be pleased. He has sometimes fancied, so have I, that you cared for Anna.'

So Philip was persuaded to put an end to his doubts.

All day he was alternately thinking hopelessly of his chance of acceptance, and putting the thought from him. His

work was done as well as usual, his village friends did not find him forgetful of their small cares, ailments, joys and difficulties,—Trot and Jerry missed no enthusiasm in the manner in which he entered into their favourite game of hide-and-seek; only Grace, who had extraordinary powers of vision, saw a difference in his bearing, a changed expression on his face.

'Brother,' she said that evening, as, side by side, they stood near Trot's little bed, looking down at the slumber which had succeeded the saying of prayers; 'Brother, you cannot deceive me; there is something on your mind.'

'Yes, Grace,' he answered meekly. 'I am resolving to go and see Miss Broughton, to ask her to promise to become my wife.'

When the words were spoken, he remembered that Grace might not like being banished from her position as mistress at the cottage.

She made no reply for a few seconds; it was her habit to meditate before speaking; a habit which did not lessen the acid quality of the words when they came.

'A widower generally marries again; probably if your second wife dies you will look out for a third. Against Anna Broughton there is nothing that can be said, as far as I am aware. Your children have not suffered for want of a mother's care, therefore . . .'

'I know it, Grace,—from my heart I am grateful to you!'

Grace met his implied praise with chilling unconcern.

'There is no occasion for gratitude,

brother; I have merely done my duty by you and yours. When you interrupted me I was about to say that if you marry it will be for your own sake solely. For this reason you would do well not to regard the matter as of supreme consequence.'

'I love Miss Broughton,' said Philip boldly. 'I have loved her for many years, and we are told, Grace, that . . . it is not good for man to be alone.'

Grace smiled sarcastically, contenting herself with the remark,

'It is much better for some women to be alone, however, and Anna Broughton may be destined by Providence for a life of single blessedness.'

Small discouragements play great havoc with the hopes of a humble lover. Poor Philip, having believed in happy moments

that he had but to ask to receive the promise of Anna's hand and heart, now began to see a thousand reasons why she would be likely to refuse to marry her father's curate.

Grace having left the night-nursery, he dropped on his knees beside his little girl's bed, and hid his face in his hands. From the wall a picture of the Christ looked down with benign eyes upon his bowed head. A simple, loyal, pure heart, was this man's; he was profoundly true in all he did or said, so that his human passion, hallowed as it was by being sanctioned by his conscience, possessed him completely.

Anna, who had seen in him more of the engrossed father than the anxious lover, had failed to understand the mainspring of his character. When his thoughts were filled with household cares, anxieties about

Trot's feverish cold, pleased consideration how to spare from a meagre income a few extra shillings for some delicacies to tempt her capricious appetite,—when he walked along in a 'brown study,' a doll's head sticking out of his pocket, he was as truly Anna's lover as though he had been employed in writing verses in her honour. Just because his whole being was possessed by his love, he did not need to jealously devote every instant's reflection to the same subject.

'My God, help me to be worthy of my love for this woman:' that was one of Philip's nightly prayers.

Even his religion was a part of his human passion, raising it above the selfish fever of a common affection.

He rose from his knees slowly, not ashamed of the impulse which had made

him kneel, and, bending, kissed his baby's little clenched fist which lay on the counterpane. Then he went to Jerry's cot, smiled at the chubbiness and healthy colour of the unconscious face, laid his hand an instant on the golden brown curls that matched so exactly the hue of his own hair and beard. When he crossed the room and went downstairs he trod on tip-toe.

Then he went to seek his lady-love.

Anna was walking in the rectory garden. A book was in her hand, but she closed it when she saw that Mr. Hedworth wished to walk with her. She had been vexed with him because he had championed Richard instead of rebuking his rebellion, but her vexation lessened as she realised that he had merely refrained from telling tales. He thought that she was looking noble, for her bearing was dignified, her

face solemn, with that expression of the lips which showed when she was holding back the girlish impetuosities of word and thought which had sometimes power over her.

'I met Grace this morning, and she told me Trot is better. I am very glad you are spared any further anxiety, Mr. Hedworth.'

'You are very good,' he said, as he stepped on to the path and began to adapt his pace to hers. 'Yes, my little girl is well now. She has just been saying her prayers for me to hear. I never need to remind her to say, "God bless Miss Anna."'

'Dear little soul!' said Miss Broughton, naturally. 'I hope neither she nor Jerry will ever give you any serious trouble.'

'While you were walking here alone,

and trying to keep your mind to what you were reading, your thoughts had gone to your brother. Am I not right? Dick said in his letter to me that he means to make "a good fight;" he would not write that if he did not mean it from his heart; neither would he use the word "good," if he had not good intentions. Do not worry about him, Miss Anna. I believe the day may come when you will be able to be proud of him.'

'Perhaps so; at least, it is well that he is away from Maycross.'

'Love is often a great ennobler.'

'For a girl like Mattie Purvis?'

'Richard honestly believes that she has every virtue,—she is his embodiment of a thoroughly good woman.'

'It seems incredible, yet if you say so it must be true,' admitted Anna.

'I know that love helps a man to do his duty,' added Philip. 'It makes the earth beautiful; and how much easier it is to work well among beautiful than among dreary surroundings.'

Anna blushed a little; she recognised a tone in this man's voice which every woman can hear in the accents of the man who loves her, when his thoughts concern herself. It was composed of an indescribable softness, a thrill;—a lingering sweetness was in the flavour of words spoken to her.

For a moment she remembered that in a novel she had read the heroine had heard a strange harshness in the most lover-like speech of the man whom she had married; at least Philip Hedworth's wife would not have to complain of this.

But was there any satisfaction in so placid, ordinary, reasonable a love-affair?—Romance?—Was not romance something deeper, and masterful?—She was not thrilled herself by the knowledge that in the curate's heart she was enshrined.—He was only a commonplace little man, with no serious faults, and a great many domestic virtues.

There were other men in the world whose way of loving must be infinitely superior. There was, for instance, Basil Morne, who was not 'happy.'—Anna fancied she could imagine how powerful an influence passion might be over Barbara's brother. *He* would not be able to forget it, lay it aside for a time, until hours of work and duty were over,—to forget it in the consideration of some

nursery detail.—He was a man indeed; —there was something womanly about Philip.

Swift as swallows' flight her banished thoughts thronged back to her, reminding her of her own new unvoiced longing for change, excitement, *life*. Philip Hedworth was part of the old routine; had she not seen him every day for years past, had she not walked with him often in this garden at sunset-time? Then why should this sunset-walk be productive of any alteration in their friendship?—This was not quite fair to Philip; for his feeling for her had long been warmer than a friend's, and to him there was a sweet but bewildering element of novelty in this stroll down the rose-path.

But, as swallows, wheeling, wing their

quick way to other lands, so Anna's thoughts turned from realms of longing to realms of common-sense.—She remembered that she was her father's daughter. —Was she, Anna Broughton, to dream of romance as any poor, uneducated, common girl might do? No, indeed. To what depth had Richard not fallen through indulging sentiment?

Her thoughts had not taken long, and Philip was still walking beside her, his eyes downcast; his own meditation had kept him from noticing hers.

'Yes, love helps a man,' he said again, slowly.

Anna turned her face towards him encouragingly.

'When it is wise love, Mr. Hedworth.'

'God-given,' he answered, reverently.

'For a long while I have loved you, but have wanted courage to tell you so; but to-day your mother encouraged me to speak.'

'Mother!' cried Anna.

'She was very kind to me. We were talking about Richard, and, without premeditation I spoke to her of myself, my hope that you might be willing to let me call you wife.—Dear,—will you think of this?'

He had paused, and was looking full in her eyes, seeing great beauty in them. Basil Morne was of opinion that Anna would make a grand woman; Philip Hedworth regarded her as a good one.

She was not shy; her heart beat no faster; her thoughts were all calm and collected.

'There is no need for me to keep you

in suspense, Mr. Hedworth,' she said, firmly, 'because I have nothing but respect and liking for you.'

His expression showed that he was puzzled by her reply. 'Nothing but respect and liking.' That might mean sufficient, or not at all good measure of regard. Anna was looking sweetly placid, with that dignity of bearing still the most marked characteristic of her personality. A great humbleness took possession of his heart: but so true, even in its foibles, was this man's nature, that he realized, while he trembled, that his humility, his awe of her, was owing partly to the knowledge that he, the curate, was wooing his rector's daughter. Had their positions been reversed, had it been he who was condescending, and she who received his condescension, in a tumult of warm words

would he have won her to view the stern fact of their mutual inequality as non-existent, or at least only existent on account of the falseness of the world's class-divisions; he, the simple, quiet, not very tactful man, would have striven by every means to have done away with any humiliation she might have felt.

Anna, serenely self-satisfied in that she was doing her duty, condescended to accept his devotion; meaning by every word and glance to be gracious, but not wishing to lessen his humility. Had she thought tenderly how to spare his pride pain she would have framed her answer differently.

He, bearing his humbling as only great natures can bear slights, meekly asked her,

'Respect and liking? Dear, I do not

understand if by that you mean that you like me well enough?'

'I meant,' said Anna, 'that I have known you long enough to appreciate what you offer me. You would not have had me love you before you had asked for my love?'

He took her hand; holding hands, as children do, they walked on down the rose-path. Only one of them, the man, felt the solemnity of this choice of each other which they were making; for he had learned that true love is a pure religion, whereas the girl thought of it in the light of a romance.

In his heart was a prayer, the one he had prayed an hour ago, beside his child's cot; 'My God, help me to be worthy of my love for this woman!'

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The words were trite, yet held wonderful meaning for him, when he answered,

'My dearest, you have given me overwhelming happiness.'

Anna saw that his face was bright; the effect was as of a thousand smiles concentrated into a single one; yet she was so completely mistress of her own emotions at the moment, that she thought pityingly of him. Why? Because he was a creature of such little consequence; because all his feelings were small. Only masterful men are capable of over-mastering passions, so some women think; really there is a contradiction in the phrase, which states no fact, only a delusion.

Poor little Mr. Hedworth!

'I promise you,' Anna answered him, 'that I will try my best to be a good mother to your two children.'

And then she felt that she had said all that Philip had any right to expect.

It was true that, in his humility, he was glad, blessing her for her kindness, thanking Heaven for his own enviable lot; but his cup of joy was not brimming—he found its contents sweet, yet not satisfying. Therefore he told himself that human bliss is always incomplete; and said his night-prayers with extra fervour.

'Our love is strange to the dear girl just at first,' he said to himself; 'as time passes she will grow accustomed to it, and I shall be able to tell her better how I treasure her.'

So he could not remember that the human joys of the future must be full of the same alloy as had been those of the past. He expected to be satisfied some day. Not a good logician, or a clever man

in any way, Philip deceived himself easily; the next meeting would make up for the slight cloud over the last, another would be more radiant still, the future all sunshine; for Anna was to be his good angel, leading him towards the performance of worthy works, making his whole life better by her influence.

His simplicity as a man was excelled by his simplicity as a lover. Had anyone told him that Anna needed to be led herself by some strong hand he would have laughed the idea to scorn, before remembering to be offended at it.

CHAPTER III.

In one of the bed-rooms of the Hollies Barbara and her friend, Miss Hilda, sat sewing.

It was a rainy afternoon, with occasional shows of sunshine; at which times the air would seem to float like a golden film over the country. Outside, beyond the dripping ivy which wreathed the window-frame, a young aspen-tree shivered and trembled, keeping up a continual accompaniment, not unlike whispering, to the conversation of the two women who were working indoors. Farther away still, out of reach of

the longest aspen-branch, stood a mountain-ash, with red berries glistening with wet radiance; and some of these berries, as fair as flowers, little Miss Hilda had plucked, and wore, delicately arranged, in the bosom of her white gown.

Barbara had not adorned herself in any way; her cotton dress was creased and faded; her hair had come uncurled because of the dampness of the atmosphere, and now and again sent a long strand downwards into her eyes as she bent her head over her sewing. Impatiently she would toss these locks back over her forehead; but, except for these interruptions, her hand never ceased its needle-practice. Seldom did Miss Morne show such praise-worthy industry. To-day she had a special reason for being good.

The material upon which she worked was soft in texture, a woollen stuff with silk lines running through it, and of a pale amber colour. Miss Hilda had a flounce of the same, which she was daintily hemming with those invisible stitches our grandmothers loved. The whole was to be Barbara's dinner-dress for that evening, when some friends of her brother's, and a spare lady or two, were coming down to make the Hollies less dull.

Barbara had worn that dress a few times only, but it had pleased her to alter the bodice in accordance with the prevailing fashion; her wardrobe could have furnished her with many a gown cut in the latest style, but this amber stuff had for her as many dear associations as there were silken threads in its woof. Had this not been so, Barbara, who despised girls

who made the art of dressing a study, would not have spent the afternoon stitching in Miss Hilda's company. That little lady would gladly have performed all the labour, only her old-fashioned excellence of needle-craft was not adapted for securing rapid effects. Sometimes, particularly when in difficulties, Barbara was silent; at other times she chattered, half to herself, half to Miss Hilda. Her usual theatrical gestures were impossible, for her hands were occupied with other matters. She was her natural self, and not always agreeable. Sometimes Miss Hilda prompted conversation.

'My dear, you must let me find you some yellow roses to wear with this frock.'

'Yellow roses aren't obtainable in a wilderness.'

'I saw the bud of one in the shrubbery,'

said the little woman, thoughtfully; 'but if there are none in the garden, I am sure some of the cottage people will let me have some of theirs, if I ask them nicely. People are very kind, darling; there is a tiny boy, who lives at the chimney-sweep's, for example; the other day, when I paused to admire the hollyhocks growing by the front path, he picked me one of the very tallest.'

'And you carried it over your shoulder all the way home, regardless of ear-wigs. Plague upon this frill—it won't set right.'

'I wish I were a dress-maker!' sighed Miss Hilda.

She often wished for skill and talents, but always that she might be of service to others.

'Do you?' asked Barbara, sarcastically. 'I don't. My back and fingers ache

already; I shall be in a vile temper by to-night.'

'Oh no, dear; you are a trifle hasty sometimes, that is all.'

'Flatterer!'

'Yellow is a beautiful colour, it always reminds me of butter-cups and water-iris; but pink is yet more lovely, the pink of summer-roses. I do not understand why you will not wear your pink gown to-night, love; but no doubt you have an adequate reason?'

'Adequate, yes; but whether good or bad, wise or foolish, I don't pretend to know.'

'*He* always likes me best in pale blue,' whispered Miss Hilda, her cheeks growing delicately rosy as she made the confidence.

Barbara looked up from the sewing, with an odd expression of scorn in her

eyes, but a smile not ungentle on her lips. Of late, since their friendship had strengthened, her friend had poured many shy secrets into her ear. Poor Ophelia's Hamlet was dead and buried long years ago in all probability, but no detailed account of his death had ever reached England; the rumour of his loss, a rumour which had been accepted as a certainty now by everyone else, had not been repeated to his betrothed. Long waiting, many terrors,—for he, a soldier, had taken part in many battles,—had years earlier robbed little Miss Hilda of some of her mental faculties; she did not realise the lapse of years:—happy in her universal good-will, still rejoicing that he, the hero of heroes, had chosen her before all other women for his love, she lived on in a heaven of grateful peace, expecting him

every day; disappointed perhaps at night, but confidently expecting him to-morrow; and looked searchingly in the faces of all the young men she met. Time had not power to impress her; she fancied that her youthful lover was youthful still, and never, in spite of looking-glasses, learned that she herself was old. With a sweet childish faith, clinging to the memory of one who had wrapped his love about her soul, she walked through life, up the hill and now downwards towards the valley, feeling secure in that blissful protection. 'He always likes me best in pale blue!' This was how she spoke of the man whose bones were dust in a desert,—whose beard, had he lived, would have been grey to-day as were some strands of her own fading hair. God had given a great blessing to this simple creature, and human

beings, with the blindness of earthly gaze, saw absurdity in her girlishly-dressed figure and love-lit, line-encircled eyes.

Barbara was not above this weakness; she knew, better than anyone else did, how noble a faith was this which her little friend cherished, how pure was the heart of this woman for whom love had had no prize; yet she looked up with a pitying glance which was scornful, and saw, in Miss Hilda's romance, that ridiculous side which can be found to many tragedies.

'He seems to have been a great critic of costume.'

'So he is, love,' said Miss Hilda, reverting to the use of the present tense; 'but then he has such exceptionally good taste. I have guessed that you wear yellow in order to please someone;—eh, my darling, is it indeed so? Last time

you honoured me by coming under my humble roof you had on an amber-coloured ribbon round your throat, and in the evening when you permitted me to do my poor best to entertain some of your friends, you appeared in this very frock which we are now altering.'

Barbara gave a short laugh.

'It's little use trying to please a person who never expresses pleasure.'

'Perhaps he is bashful, dear. My Albert was very bashful with me just at first.'

'I don't think it's that, Miss Hilda. If I weren't a fool I shouldn't be talking about him—much less should I trouble myself to wear yellow because he once said it suited me. No doubt he's an impostor—a hypocrite;—all men seem to be!'

'Not all.'

'Of course Albert was different.'

'True, darling: I am exceptionally fortunate.'

Barbara laughed bitterly. Many times she had nearly forced Miss Hilda to realise that fate was cruel to her, that she was living in a fool's paradise of belief. At this moment, feeling herself that life had nothing good, she longed to snatch happy delusion from this woman, who ought to have suffered but who had not.

She did not speak the words her bitter thoughts dictated; there was an influence about Miss Hilda which made people kind even when they laughed at her. When they thought her most ridiculous, the ridicule was sympathetic.

'Oh, don't let us talk about men, unless you want to make me wild. I believe,

my brother, . . . and Albert of course, . . . are the only tolerable specimens of their sex.'

'And the gentleman who likes yellow.'

'I don't suppose he is any real exception, he only looks like one; and he despises me.'

'My dear love, I will never believe it!' cried the affectionate little woman.

'Nor I,' said Barbara. 'If I did I should respect him. Mr. Chester began by despising me, and ended by worshipping my worst sins. Humbugs—all men are humbugs.'

Miss Hilda was greatly pained for 'darling Barbara's' sake, distressed that she should cherish such a terrible opinion, but trusted to time to alter her want of faith in the sterner sex.

That afternoon, an hour or two later,

she walked to the village, shedding smiles right and left, and searching for yellow roses. By buying or begging she was successful, and came home delighted, carrying a basketful of 'Maréchal Niels.'

Meanwhile Barbara, lying on the bed, resting after her unusual task of sewing, had indulged in more hopes, and spurned more hopes, than any average girl would be troubled with in the whole course of a love affair. Miss Morne was sure either to love strongly or hate fiercely the man who was the cause of so many of her day-dreams.

Mr. Calkin made a great effort. His nephew, Basil, supplied the guests, and the money to provide for their entertainment, but he had to provide the host. Not being adapted by nature to play the part well, yet resolved that no one else should

play it in his house, the good man went through a hasty course of study, assimilating the contents, often contradictory, of many books on etiquette.

All the rooms had been put in order, chairs ranged symmetrically against the walls, and illustrated books made into patterns on the tables.

Mr. Morne had told his friends that, if they accepted his invitation to dine and sleep at the Hollies, they would be obliged to rough it. Mr. Calkin, fortunately for his pride, did not know this.

The village fly had been ordered to meet the seven o'clock train, so had the village omnibus. By eight o'clock the guests were in the drawing-room, being entertained by the Mornes, Miss Hilda, and Mr. Calkin. They were all influential in

one way or another: many were political.

A tall, fair man, middle-aged but anxious not to look so, stood by the window talking to Barbara.

'Poor youth, he is more awkward than ever!' Miss Morne was saying, directing her companion's attention to a beardless boy who was trying to appear interested in some photographs that Miss Hilda was showing him. 'The only brilliancy he can boast comes from his gilding!'

'If he had escaped being born half-witted he would have had no chance to distinguish himself. The sons of Cabinet Ministers are too heavily weighted to be able to show their paces.'

'Lord Illworth is a dear old man!' cried Bab. 'I assure you Basil thinks no end of his chief! But presently you'll see some specimens of rustic imbecility; we

have asked the curate and the rector. The latter is the father of my poor friend, Anna Broughton.'

'The young woman who used to write you those lengthy letters, and who was so great upon Sunday-schools?'

It is to be feared that Barbara had not always resisted the temptation to jest at the expense of her friend. Some consciousness of her own infidelity made her colour now, and exclaim angrily:

'My dear Mr. Aldborough, don't cultivate a good memory, it will be a curse to you and others. Anna Broughton is too good to be made ridiculous by her father; I rely upon you to help me shake her out of her docility.'

'Shall I make love to her? I don't mind doing it, to please you.'

Bab laughed.

'You are very obliging.'

'Perhaps Hambleton will cut me out; she must be his sort, to judge by the description.'

Two white teeth showed between Barbara's lips; her eyes gave out a flash, her fingers gripped her fan. Mr. Aldborough, who lived socially for the sake of being as disagreeable as possible, enjoyed the success of his suggestion.

'Don't you know that people who are alike never take a fancy to one another?' she asked.

'That must depend on disposition. Hambleton is on the look-out for a wife, for I made him admit the fact last year; but he won't be caught easily. He expects too much of a woman; beauty and virtue, as we understand them, won't satisfy him: he wants beauty of soul and religious

convictions. I told him that he's got enough religion for two, and he might find a wife who had a like superfluity of personal attractions to make the balance even; but he didn't seem to see the justice of the idea.'

'Then you had better marry some ugly woman who is extremely amiable!'

'Offer the advice to Hambleton; he doesn't appreciate a pretty face.'

'Mr. Hambleton seems to have confided all his likes and dislikes to you, according to your account!'

'People generally confide in me. You did, in Switzerland.'

'*I?*'

'About your books.'

'*Books!* Bah!' cried Barbara, 'that was no confidence at all. What are books?—mine, at any rate? Travesties of life,

with false sentiment supplied so much per volume at the cost of brain-racking!'

A stout, dark man, who was standing under the old-fashioned glass chandelier, looked across the room at the speaker, having overheard her last words. The light fell upon his bearded, bronzed face. Certainly Lynn Hambleton had no superfluity of beauty.

Barbara, who was in a rebellious mood, nodded at him defiantly, raising her voice to include him in the conversation.

'Don't look so shocked, Mr. Hambleton. You don't advise me to take my own works *au serieux*, do you? Think what a wreck I should become. Women writers seldom live to get their measure of fame, because they suffer all the tragedies they write about.'

'If *you* took your work seriously . . .'

'It would be a drug in the market! Ordinary seriousness commands no price to speak of; people must have passion, either of virtue or its opposite.'

'It would be an interesting study, the career of some man or woman who was passionately good,' said Mr. Hambleton, smiling. 'You once came very near doing the work in one of your books.'

Barbara crossed the room, and left her step-uncle to converse with Jack Aldborough. She stood beside Hambleton, in the candle-light.

'Which book was it?'

'"Janet Wilbraham's Sacrifice."'

'That milk-and-water rubbish haunts me continually!—people will praise it! I'm sure it had the rank flavour of hypocrisy.'

'No; it was very fresh and true—only

a little feverish at the end. Nothing will persuade me that you were a hypocrite when you wrote it.'

'Ah, I've changed since those days; if I wrote like that now I *should* be a hypocrite.—Here comes Anna Broughton and her father, followed by the curate. He is an odiously good young man, but you will probably like him.'

Anna was looking grave. She had been to other dinner-parties, but this one seemed more important. She thought this was because her dear friend was hostess. As she felt shy she was apparently dignified, for she always steadily repressed nervousness. In her new white dress, with her fair hair neatly coiled at the back of her head, she followed her father into the room.

Philip Hedworth watched her proudly.

He was not self-conscious, knowing that he was of small consequence to anyone present—with the exception of Anna.

Mr. Broughton, stately in figure and demeanour, responded cordially to Mr. Calkin's greeting, benevolently smiled upon Barbara, and expressed his pleasure at again meeting Miss Morne's brother. The good rector regarded any M.P. as a celebrity. Basil was also secretary to Lord Illworth, the Foreign Minister.

Barbara welcomed Anna effusively.

'My darling girl, you must let me introduce our friends to you!'

'You are very kind, but please do not trouble about me,' said Anna, in her soft voice.

Then Barbara greeted Mr. Hedworth; noticing that he was neither stiff nor

excited, she wondered 'where the man had learned to behave?'

'How do you do? There's a notable personage here I want you to know,—that dark woman in the corner,—she's Mrs. Barking, great on Ibsen and Björnson, you remember. No doubt you'll interest one another.'

In a moment Barbara had landed Mr. Hedworth on a sofa at the other end of the room, and was back again at Anna's side.

'Now, dearest; our curate-friend will be happily occupied until dinner-time. Mrs. Barking loves to tackle curates. Rumour declares that she keeps a list of those she has vanquished in argument, as a savage keeps the scalps of the foes he has speared.'

'Is she an atheist?' asked Anna, anxiously.

'No, only a free-thinker; that's nothing now-a-days. Near my uncle is Lord Illworth's hopeful son and heir, the idiotic-looking youth with the spectacles; in front of you is Lady Augusta Dollinger, who was once a beauty, and is now hideous, but powerful in the councils of the party. Basil reveres power in all its forms; he is the most ambitious man living, himself. He has great plans; and wants to get to the top of the tree, so that he may have an opportunity to carry them out. Unluckily he's not rich enough to get to the top by one step, it's a tiresome mount. Our father ought to have left all his money to Basil instead of dividing it, a bit to me, and a bit to our half-brother.'

'Is Mr. Reuben Drive here?'

'No,—there's some sort of a quarrel between him and Basil; he sticks to his bank and speculations, and Basil sticks to politics. A political man, who is trusted with Government secrets, lays himself open to suspicion if he has much to do with speculators. Lord Illworth tells Basil many secrets, and has implicit trust in him dear foolish old man.'

'Bab, you don't mean——'

'Oh, it's safe with Basil, of course! But confidence is always foolish. Then, under the chandelier is . . . Lynn Hambleton.'

'Did you not meet Mr. Hambleton years ago? when you were at Leeds for the festival?'

'What a memory you have! Yes, I did. He was inspecting factories for the

Government, and slumming for pleasure! It is only as a colleague of Basil's that he comes here;—I know that.'

In Barbara's protestation, 'I know that,' sounded a note of defiance. Anna's ears heard it. She looked at her friend with interest. Barbara was watching Mr. Hambleton. Presently he glanced quickly at her. As Barbara met his gaze her own eyes fell and she blushed.

All this Anna saw, and formed her own conclusions.

'He has a noble face. I am sure he must be a very good man.'

'You can't say he has a handsome face,—not even out of politeness; and the fact that people call him good does not make him so. I expect all "good" people to turn out humbugs, as Mr. Chester did.'

'Do not speak so bitterly, dear Bar-

bara,' pleaded Anna, earnestly. 'Surely it is safe to praise a man who devotes his life and abilities to the achievement of great purposes?'

'You think that?' Barbara asked, recovering from her blush. 'Then you must admire Basil. All his purposes are great ones, and he works as hard as a galley-slave. I'll give you some of his speeches to read; the old boy's noble sentiments and enthusiastic perorations on the subject of Duty,—with a very big D,—will set your heart beating. I don't pretend to have glorious aims, but he has, any number.'

Anna's eyes lit up with glad interest. Barbara, seeing them, was surprised to find how rapidly her own plan was thriving.

'Ah, Bab, you must indeed be proud of

him. In the midst of the world, in spite of his own unhappiness, he works heart and soul for his country's good! I am glad, —it must comfort him!'

'I *am* proud. My brother is a king among men. He is popular, clever, refined, handsome, cute, enthusiastic, confidential yet not weak, strong in determination, never afraid of appearances, business-like, and, above all, ambitious. That panegyric doesn't do him justice. Years ago he loved and lost, now he fears to love again, lest new unhappiness might take away his ambitions and his aims. He admires you, dear, so you ought to admire him in fairness.'

'*Me!*' cried Anna, 'I am not at all admirable!'

'He shall come to talk to you now,' said Barbara, 'because, poor fellow, he will

have to take Mrs. Barking in to dinner. How all the others chatter! Jack Aldborough sneers, as usual, Lady Augusta is simpering, and your curate is probably relating how his babies teethed.'

Anna flushed. She could not speak up then and there to announce that Mr. Hedworth was engaged to her, that she had promised to be a mother to those same babies; yet having to keep the secret from her friend even for an hour or so was a trial. All day she had been in one of her most sensible moods, doing household tasks not only with care, but with satisfaction, thinking proudly that when she was the curate's wife, she would have no temptation to be other than an example to the young women of the parish. To be the model daughter of the rector was more difficult. Once her finger showed a golden

band, and Trot and Jerry had been taught to call her 'Mamma,' she would feel very safe and sure of herself. Girls have not easy lives as a rule; those whose vocation is marriage probably feel that their circumstances will be changed some day and are restless in their childhood's homes. Anna believed that it was her vocation to be a good wife, and, in her wiser moments, rejoiced in the knowledge that Philip Hedworth, who had chosen her, was a most worthy man.

But in the drawing-room of the Hollies, Philip's worthiness appeared less excellent a quality than the easiness of Jack Aldborough's manner, or the brilliant conversational abilities of Barbara. 'We must all seem very stupid and countrified to these clever people,' Anna thought, regretfully. Looking at her betrothed,

she saw that he was talking with exceeding earnestness, gesticulating with his right hand, which showed a frayed wristband, while Mrs. Barking was laughing noisily. Evidently the celebrated Ibsenite found this curate very diverting. Looking at the rector, Anna saw that he was not at his ease; handsome in form and feature she had always thought her dear father, only of late had she doubted the profundity of his intellect. To-night he did not show at his best. He had the air of a man out of his proper place.

Anna, who had always carried herself well, felt suddenly that her dress was ill-made, her figure clumsy; wished to be small, insignificant, black-robed, that she might retreat behind the window curtains to survey the room and its occupants while herself unseen. The sensation was

very uncomfortable. In her white attire she was a more attractive vision than she knew; the glances which fell on her, which she attributed to disdain, were compliments to her grace and physical charms.

After dinner Barbara kept Mrs. Barking amused by lively stories culled from her own experience; to which Anna listened in amazement, missing the 'points,' dimly appreciating the jokes. Catch-words, allusions, references to the past annals of smart people, were unintelligible as Greek to the rector's daughter.

'I envy you, Miss Broughton,' cried Lady Augusta, shrilly. 'You have all your faiths to lose, whereas I lost mine in the schoolroom.'

'I hope I shall gain more instead of losing those I have already,' said Anna,

seriously. At which Barbara smiled at Lady Augusta, who murmured,

'Marvellous!'

Later, in the garden, where the moon was forcing shafts of light between the tangled branches of the trees and a cool air was blowing, Basil and Anna had a *tête-à-tête* conversation.

She had been walking with Barbara, round whom congregated the younger men, but he touched her arm, drawing her aside to inspect an old sundial.

'See, Miss Anna,' he said, 'some solemn old fellow had this stone engraved with a motto expressing his philosophy.'

Bending to trace the letters, Anna read:

'Wasted hours are the damned souls of Time, and he who wastes them feeds the Fire.'

She blushed for the strong language, but, finding good in the sentiment, answered, with her usual directness,

'I believe that.'

'So do I,' said Mr. Morne, quickly. 'Life is one great opportunity,—every wasted second cries out for ever against its sacrificer.'

'There must be a great deal for anyone —like you—to do.'

'An incredible amount! I can't do one half I would, but I never leave off working.'

'Of course our life on earth is a benefit for which we owe a debt. My father always holds that view; and the after-world can only be won by the performance of our duty.'

'That idea I don't like,' he answered,— 'the idea of working for the sake of earning a happy future. I never think about

heaven,—on principle. The motives of the ordinary zealous Christian are all ignoble, his efforts are all on his own behalf, at least he saves himself before saving others. A religious person might be good out of gratitude, or out of love, if his faith was strong enough; but the religion of creed revolts me. For myself, I am not religious any way; but I admit that I have a duty to man—to the world. Every man's duty is the same, to work out the talents that are in him.'

'For noble ends!' said Anna, eagerly.

Basil nodded.

'Oh, certainly. Great men always do good in their centuries, even when they aren't too scrupulous as to means.—The others are coming back to us. How they would laugh if they knew we had been talking seriously!'

'They do not seem serious themselves,' Anna admitted, 'but no doubt we see only the outsides of their characters.'

'Bab is certainly grave enough at times; Hambleton is in deadly earnest; so is your father, so is the curate. But, of course, curates are serious professionally.'

Anna blushed up to her eyes.

'I am going to marry Mr. Hedworth!' she said, simply. 'I wanted to tell Barbara, but I felt shy; if she knew she wouldn't make fun of him.'

CHAPTER IV.

Next day was Wednesday.—Anna woke up, out of dreams of another life, to find that many small duties called for performance. Though she had gone to bed late she was dressed in time for breakfast; which simple fact made her certain that mild dissipations do not interfere with necessary routine. She regretted that she would not be asked to another dinner-party for a long while, in all probability. Since society did no harm to her she allowed herself to wish for more of it.

The rector was taking breakfast with his wife, so Anna sat down to hers alone, as she often had to do; the meal thus became an occasion for meditation, for this country-girl was no epicure. Day-dreams were sweeter to her than the flavour of any fruit or viand.

Deep down in her heart, suppressed by a vague sense of duty, cast into shadow by the brightness of lingering excitement, lay a feeling of disappointment.

She would not recognise it, so could not search it analytically; but it was not caused by any failure of the evening's amusement.

As she sat there at the table, sipping coffee and breaking bread, she said to herself, while a smile softened her face,

'I never enjoyed myself so well before.'

The knowledge that men had admired

her had nothing to do with that after-glow of pleasure. Anna had forgotten the other men, or only thought of them as forming an effective background to Basil. He it was who had furnished her with that happy memory, for he had talked with her as a man talks only to a person for whom he has some respect. She was able to congratulate herself, 'he does not despise me.' Having felt that the other men had thought her 'countrified,' she was proportionately grateful to have been treated as an equal, not only in station but in intellect, by Barbara's brother.

Anna's pride had been fed by respect since she had left childhood behind her. The village-folk had always 'looked up' to Miss Broughton, her girls had behaved respectfully both in class and out of it, the county-people had invited her to their

annual garden-parties. To have been slighted by Basil Morne would have given Anna more pain than to have been slighted by any other man, therefore having been specially favoured by him filled her with pleasure, quickening her self-esteem. Probaby most downfalls of character could be traced back to an increase of pride. The elated spirit soars above earth and small principles, striving after higher altitudes, where goodness not only *is* heroism but appears so. And the eyes of the spirit, looking down at old ambitions, old virtues, think them insignificant, beneath notice.

Anna ate because she was not accustomed to neglecting her breakfast; she scarcely knew what she tasted; her housewifely anxiety would have been keen on ordinary mornings to notice whether the cocoa was burned, the loaf ill-baked, or the

butter badly churned, but to-day that same capacity for anxiety was exercised on behalf of a more important matter. She was wondering whether Basil Morne would ever gain religious faith, and whether she could effect his conversion?

How could a girl help being excited when she had heard over-night that a clever man admired her? How could a rector's daughter be to blame for spending all her mental energies upon a desire to comfort a fellow-creature who was not happy?

After longing vainly for some knowledge of the deeper springs of human existence, for some experience of all-permeating romance, Anna Broughton had found revealed for her alone the secret sorrow of a hero.

She was a very natural, unselfconscious

creature. As she rose from the breakfast-table, and went towards the kitchen to give her orders to the cook, she found herself praying fervently for the future happiness of Basil. And she did not blush to know that her mind and heart were filled with thought of him, for her religious fervour was so justifiable. A newly-engaged girl might otherwise have been blameworthy in devoting emotional meditation to the consideration of the affairs of a man not her betrothed. As matters were, to have thought long and emotionally of Philip Hedworth would have been a waste of time, Anna reflected; he represented everyday excellence, which may be taken for granted; while Basil Morne typified exceptional possibilities for good work very much out of the common.

Only such trivial interests as good

cooking, darning and mending, new hymn tunes, accounts, pinafores and poultices, were associated with the father of Trot and Jerry. Formerly all these trivialities had made up Anna's mental life, except when she was dutifully studying history or geography by way of improving her education; and though she had not neglected them, she had always felt that she had a soul above them. Now they were relegated to the care of custom:—she was in the habit of serving those interests, so they would not be neglected, but there was no need for her soul to narrow itself down to their consideration.

It was necessary for her father's dinner to be prepared, and she helped to make pastry for an apple-tart;—then the mending of the household linen occupied her hands—this was part of the routine which

would occupy her when she was Philip's wife;—then she looked out the hymns to be practised for Sunday, filed the last account of the library expenses, cut out a pinafore to be worked for Trot as a useful birthday present, and searched a book for a recipe for a bran poultice which she had promised to copy for Trot's anxious father.

Thus, Philip and his affairs were cared for by the girl who had promised to marry him, though not two consecutive moments of thought did she give to him personally.

Dinner-time soon came. Mr. Broughton shared that meal with his daughter, but did not talk much, on account of a doubt which was harassing him,—a doubt connected with the probable result of a summons issued against Purvis.

'You are looking bright and well to-day, my dear, I notice with pleasure,' he said

benevolently. 'It is always a bad sign when a woman is unable to throw off the effects of a frivolous holiday, such as we enjoyed last night.'

Anna felt that she deserved this commendation.

'Perhaps I am too old to be much affected by frivolity, father; I have been thinking that its effect was good; I have done a great many small things this morning.'

'Human animals have an innate liking for society,' said the rector, with smile; 'we are gregarious. I am not certain that I altogether approve of your friend Barbara —her manner is sadly flippant,—and for one of her acquaintances, a . . . . er . . . a Mrs. Barking . . . . I have nothing but disapprobation . . . . but Mr. Morne is a thorough gentleman. As you suggest, my

dear, you are probably not young enough to run any danger of being influenced for evil by meeting persons whose views are lamentably lax.'

'Mr. Morne is not a religious man, father, but he is good, oh, very good. Barbara tells me that he is always working for noble purposes.'

'If he means well no doubt he will gain the truth some day.'

Anna looked up gratefully.

'I think Providence must . . . . make allowances,' she said.

'For those who don't know, my dear child, not for those who do,' exclaimed the rector briskly as he rose and drew back his chair. 'So we, who were born in the light, must remember what is due from us. I am going out this afternoon, into Huntstown. Don't forget to run up to

see your mother before you go to your Class meeting; she is not at all well to-day. If she is not better to morrow I shall ask Dr. Wadham to call in and see her,—as though he called by accident, you know; —it is always a mistake to alarm a nervous woman about her own health.'

'Yes, father.'

Anna did not add, 'I had forgotten my Class, that to-night, Wednesday, I have to meet the girls,'—but it was true that this fact had escaped her memory.

Since Richard's departure Miss Broughton's young women had shown great devotion to her, had flocked to every meeting of their Mutual Improvement Society, had walked up to the rectory upon small pretences, had watched her face and demeanour, her comings-in and goings-out. She had not been unaware that the small

tragedy which had overtaken her home-life had been a matter of intense interest to her father's parishioners, and had taken care that that interest should be made to flag for want of encouragement.

Now she realised that this meeting would be the first one since her engagement to Philip; and this reminded her of another fact, strangely forgotten before, that her father had not yet been asked for any formal assent. Philip had been away yesterday in the morning, in the afternoon the rector had been busy, in the evening the dinner-party at the Hollies had taken place; and though the Broughtons and Mr. Hedworth had entered Mr. Calkin's room together they had only met upon the doorstep. Philip had contrived to whisper to his betrothed,—'I will speak to your

father in the morning, dear;'—now morning was past, and he had not appeared.

There was no real need for scrupulous asking for parental consent, as Anna's mother had persuaded Philip to speak, and had told him the rector would welcome his success; but Anna felt that Philip's conduct had not been perfect. Had she recollected the matter earlier she would have told her father herself, before he had gone out, rather than that he should afterwards think that she had been deceitful. It was ridiculous to consider that any deception could be brought to bear upon such an insignificant affair, Anna thought; but, of course, no one else could be expected to understand this as she did. She had known for some time that Philip would propose, and that she would accept

him, as there was no reason why she should not; but a father, hearing that his daughter had been engaged for nearly two days before her lover had asked his consent, and that his child had really forgotten to mention that her word was plighted, might well be excused a feeling of indignation.

'I will tell mother,' Anna resolved. 'That will be better than doing nothing.'

She went upstairs and entered the invalid's room.

Mrs. Broughton was still in bed, her pale face looking out wistfully from among the white dimity hangings. The windows were all open, the blinds drawn up high, letting in the glorious sunshine upon carpet and curtains, which had been faded out long ago and so could take no further harm. A white butterfly and two or three bees

had found their way in, and were hovering over a jar of roses which stood on a table.

Anna, who looked the picture of health and fine development when contrasted with her mother, went and stood by the bedside, after giving her greeting kiss.

'So you are not so well, mother? It is a pity you should be obliged to lie here on such a beautiful day.'

Little Mrs. Broughton smiled as she heard the reproof of her daughter's tone.

'You see, dear, I am no use about the house when I do get up, and your father told me he thought I had bettter rest; it worries him when I am not well.'

'What is the matter?' asked the girl, practically. 'You were stronger yesterday morning, you said.'

'So I was. Last night, while you were out, I persuaded Jane to help me downstairs and into the garden; that must have tired me, I am afraid, for I nearly fainted afterwards.'

'You must not be too ambitious. If you had been contented to stay on the sofa, you would have been all right. Jane is so fond of you that she can refuse you nothing, but she ought not to have let you tire yourself.'

'Jane is very kind . . . such a strong, comely creature; it does me good to see her. I am very glad you have come, dear, for I wanted to hear how your father takes your news; I would not tell him, though I had permission, for it is better for a man to speak for himself.'

'Philip has neglected to do so,' Anna replied. 'So you knew, mother?'

'Philip sent me in a note . . . just a little note yesterday, to tell me that you have made him a happy man. Oh, my dear daughter, love is the first blessing God has given us; you will treasure it always, won't you? You won't let small quarrels, tiny unkindnesses separate your heart from the heart of your lover, will you? not even when he has become your husband?'

'I do not think that Philip is likely to quarrel or to be unkind, and I am not hot-tempered. It is neglectful of him to wait so long before asking father's consent; I should have asked for it myself before now, only I was busy, and it slipped my memory.'

'*Anna!*'

'Yes, mother.'

'You forgot you were engaged?'

'Oh, no, I only forgot that father had not heard. You need not look so shocked; I should have remembered had I believed that he would be surprised, or ill-pleased. Probably he knew Philip's wish before I did.'

'When I was first engaged I could think of nothing else. I was sure that everyone guessed by my blushes. I could scarcely live for fear some reason might make your father's father refuse to have me for his son's wife. Oh, my dear, it can't be right for you to take it so quietly.'

Anna laughed.

'Oh, yes, it is better so, mother. I do not want to have my head turned; I have too much to do.'

She had even a small feeling of gratification that she was so little excited by the fact that she had accepted her lover.

No doubt mother had been fluttered, but then mother as a girl, though she had been sweet and lovable in all probability, had not been strong-minded. In the days of her youth it had not been the fashion for young women to be independent, to think for themselves, to order their own lives; of course mother had accepted father, had been flattered, excited by his preference. That was no reason why Anna, her daughter, the young woman of another generation, should be expected to be made tremulously happy because the curate had proposed to her.

Mr. Hedworth was a gentleman, of family more than equal to that of the Broughtons; still he was only a curate, as poor as curates generally are. Anna realised that she might have done better for herself; but Philip's success had

been mainly due to the excellence of his character. The rector's daughter had no need to scheme for a wealthy husband; she could afford to value personal qualities above worldly possessions. This was her father's opinion, as she knew. Mr. Broughton would have grieved over any unbecoming avarice in his daughter. They both took pride in being unworldly.

CHAPTER V.

Anna was just leaving the rectory, for her walk to the library, when she met Philip.

As he hurried up the garden-path she stood on the doorstep awaiting him.

They met with a pressure of hands. His face lit up with a smile of satisfaction. Anna, seeing him through critical eyes, did not think that he came very near being a handsome man, but saw that his coat had worn shiny, and that his collar had shifted round his neck. Also she observed

that he was hot, as though he had walked far in the heat of the July afternoon.

'I am too late for the rector, I fear?' he asked, glancing through the hall to the open door of the study.

'Father went out two hours ago; you know he usually goes to Huntstown on Wednesdays.'

'You must forgive me,' said Philip, penitently. 'This morning I was called out early to go to see old Miss Croker at Way Farm, and, as I found her dying, I was obliged to stay.'

'Poor woman; so she is dead? Well, she was a great sufferer. Father will understand the reason of the delay. I have told him nothing.'

'You rightly considered it my business.'

'I . . . . I forgot.'

He looked at her calm face.

'Did you . . . . forget me, Anna? I have been thinking of you all morning; I could scarcely banish the thought of you from my head while I was at that poor creature's death-bed. She died happily, I am thankful to say.'

He added the last sentence nervously, as though trying by it to make up for the unclerical nature of his first speech.

Anna, who understood, despised the weakness of the attempt, but smiled indulgently. It is not easy for a woman to blame a man for thinking of her too much and too often.

'I did not forget you. Are you going in to see mother?'

'May I?'

'Why should you not? As long as you are careful not to speak of Richard, your visit will do her good; she needs cheering

up, you know. If she were not a little hypochondriacal she would feel better, father says.'

'I will try to avoid agitating her . . . . When shall I see you, Anna?'

She was surprised by the question, and showed that she was.

'Oh, we shall probably meet this evening, if you are coming to see father.'

'Yes. Grace will stay at home to-night, she has promised. Jerry has been in disgrace, for breaking a window with his ball and telling an untruth about it. I sometimes fear lest he should grow up to be deceitful; he is not as brave as I could wish,—Trot has by far more spirit,—he has a great dread of punishment.'

'It would be better if he were led more by love. A boy, a man, must feel the degradation of being obedient out of fear!'

Anna was thinking of Mr. Morne's theories on the subject.

'Grace rewards him when he is good.'

'Cannot you teach him to be good because he loves you, or Grace, or someone?'

Philip smiled.

'Isn't it better to influence him by religion, to teach him to love and fear God? Human beings may fail him, but God never will.'

'Then let him be good to please God who is good to him; not for the sake of gaining heaven or avoiding hell.'

Vaguely the curate perceived that this Anna was different to the Anna who had taught the sternest of doctrines to her Sunday scholars.

'Perhaps it does human nature good to be humbled, perhaps the pride that rebels against the desire for eternal happiness

and the dread of eternal misery may, if encouraged, make a soul rebel against being subject to the Maker in all things. He, who made human nature, created human longing and human fear.'

'Those who do not fear, nor work for payment, surely are far nobler?'

She spoke quickly, without weighing her words as she was in the habit of doing —spoke from her heart.

Philip caught a spray of the virginia creeper which trailed over the porch, and played with it. There was something strange in Anna's new manner; not understanding it he felt at a great distance from her, feared to wound her feelings by incautious words.

He was not a little disturbed by this, having hoped that once he had dared to speak and had won her, their mutual

understanding would be perfect, the communion of souls which only acknowledged love can bring about.

'Can anything be nobler than the humility that admits unworthiness?' he asked, gently, after a pause. 'We poor human beings are full of fears, our love always seeks a reward. Ought we to be ashamed to own it?'

In that moment Anna saw that Basil Morne's philosophy was not the highest, but the enlightenment made her vexed with Philip.

'We won't discuss theology,' she answered, turning away; 'I am late already; my girls will be waiting.'

The use of the word 'won't' betrayed her excitement. As a rule, Anna Broughton spoke only the best grammar, enunciating her syllables with cold correctness.

'Good-bye, for a little while,' said Philip.

He watched her out of sight down the road before he went into the rectory, and thought to himself that he must repose full confidence in her before he could expect her to confide in him.

'Something has annoyed her, dear girl,' he said to himself; 'but I too have been annoyed by something this morning; if I had told her of my vexation, no doubt she would have explained hers, and I might have been able to soothe her. Mine seemed too trivial to mention, I was afraid that by owning to it I should seem unworthy in her eyes,—I, who was preaching humility a moment ago. Oh, we are indeed poor creatures!'

As Anna entered the room of the library where her girls were assembled, she suf-

fered a momentary anxiety for fear Mattie Purvis had dared to come; but Mattie's place at the long table was ostentatiously empty, next to Kate Ruggles.

After giving and returning greetings, Anna said, authoritatively,

'Let Nelly Green sit in that chair, Kate.'

'True, it's late, miss, now, so I don't suppose anyone else will be coming.'

This small incident made Anna conscious of her dignity again,—she had temporarily forgotten it. The girls had noticed, peeping from behind the blind, that she had almost run across the road, instead of walking at a demure pace.

The meeting passed off without a hitch; the young women dutifully sewed and read; no one asked impertinent or socialistic questions. But when Anna was left

alone in the room, to put away the books, she found a piece of blotting-paper which was scrawled over with names:—'Anna Broughton,' 'Anna Hedworth,' 'Mattie Broughton,' 'Richard,' 'Dick,' 'Kate Ruggles,' 'Kate Casson and her dear Tom.'

These words were but half-scratched over in pencil; some light-minded young woman had amused herself by, in this way, predicting forthcoming marriages in the parish. Anna could have forgiven all but the name 'Mattie Broughton.'

She tore the paper into fragments, her eyes flaming with indignant anger.

'How dare anyone imagine for an instant that her brother, though a banished scapegrace, would give his name to Purvis' pretty flippant daughter?'

That evening Anna received her father's blessing.

'My dear child,' said the rector, 'I am perfectly willing to give you to this good man. Thanks be to Providence, you have learned to appreciate moral and spiritual excellence, and to ignore the attractions of worldly talents and possessions.'

But neither Anna nor her father believed that Mattie could claim the possession of 'moral or spiritual excellence.'

'I am glad that you are pleased, father,' Anna answered, dutifully. 'I have done as I thought best. Philip, as you say, is very good; there seemed to be no reason to refuse him. No doubt we shall be happy.'

'Probably he will be rector here some day, my dear, when I am laid on the shelf or . . . or in God's holy ground.'

Mr. Broughton could not suppress a sigh. Good, portly, happy-minded man!

he relished life, and felt that for him to share the common fate of humanity would be a necessary, salutary, but regrettable humiliation.

'Do not speak of that, dear father,' said Anna, kissing his cheek. 'Philip, I am sure, is proud to be your curate.'

Thus, unemotionally, was the engagement sanctioned.

CHAPTER VI.

'Is the doctor at home?'

Mr. Broughton asked the question, standing on Dr. Wadham's door-step, about eight o'clock the following morning. A rosy-cheeked servant-girl answered.

'No, sir, he's just gone out,—gone to Lennox's, down by the river, and then he's goin' on to Farmer Littles and Saxom way.'

'Well, well, ask your master to step round to the rectory as soon as he comes back.'

The news got about the town that Mrs. Broughton was ill. She had been ill for many months, but no one had suspected the fact, her few complaints having been considered of no importance.

Daily had she grown thinner, paler, but her spirits had remained the same;—that is to say, she had laughed heartily at small jokes, taken a great interest in childish trifles, only cried when her boy Dick had been sent away. Nothing but Dick's quarrel with his father had kept the little woman from her usual pursuits; for instance, she had not forgotten to feed the wild birds every morning.

The rector always taught his young parishioners to be kind to birds and animals, yet he had often regretted his wife's babyish delight in the visits of her thrushes, robins, and blackbirds. He

would come into her room, his own thoughts busy with some ecclesiastical difficulty or parish problem, and would find his helpmate clapping her hands,—softly, for fear the birds should hear,—laughing in exuberant glee, because a tomtit had come down from the fir-tree to join the feast for the first time.

'Oh, John!' she would cry, 'look at the little darling! Oh, don't, *don't* frighten him away!'

This morning she could not get up to give the birds their breakfast,—she had tried, and had nearly fainted—'turned so foolishly giddy,' as she said.

Then the rector, troubled partly for her sake and very much for his own, had sallied out to find the doctor.

By the time he had reached the ivy-covered villa, where dwelt the village

practitioner, he had recovered his own courage, deciding in his mind that 'Alice was feeling the heat,' that there was no cause for anxiety—that she must learn to take life more calmly—excitement, we all know, ruins a woman's nerves! And little Mrs. Broughton had always been very easily excited; she had made small matters into great ones, had been as keenly interested in some trivial visit as a society-dame could be in her ball of the season. The rector could not help believing that his wife had naturally a frivolous disposition. She was lovable, that he admitted; and when the idea had just occurred to him that he might be forced to say a long good-bye to her, to lose her out of his life early, an awkward moisture had sprung into his eyes, a lump had risen in his throat. It

was only by a supreme effort of self-mastery that he had forced the dread to yield to reason, telling himself that for a woman to faint meant nothing—that emotional creatures, such as Alice, went quickly down the hill of health, but remounted almost as easily.

Dr. Wadham was a despot, as a village doctor should be; he ruled Maycross sanitarily as well as Mr. Broughton ruled it religiously. People had profound confidence in his skill and in his determination, for often his cures seemed so much the result of the latter as of the former quality.

In appearance he was rough—but the external does not spoil the inner man; nuts have unpromising exteriors but soft kernels, and Oliver Wadham's heart was as tender as a good woman's. When he

lost his temper, or made use of a wicked strong word, his motive was usually an excellent one—the prevention of any injurious exhibition of sympathy, maybe, or the over-awing of some careless parent. Children loved the man, and the love of children are generally founded upon divine inspiration. It was twelve o'clock before the doctor got home, and two minutes later he was feeling Mrs. Broughton's pulse. He seemed to take but slight notice of her case, chatting instead about the Huntstown Cricket Club, of which he was an enthusiastic member.

'So you fainted, did you?' he asked, when rising to go. 'Well, mind you don't do it again. I knew a woman once—a very pretty little woman she was too—who fell down in a faint and knocked two of her front teeth out, spoiling her beauty for the

rest of her life. You, rector, you look in glorious health, but beware of getting fat, a few games would do you good, across our cricket-ground. At least, you must come down to witness our grand match on Saturday.'

In the hall, when the rector, who was letting the doctor out, began to answer his recommendation, he was silenced by an imperative,

'The match, eh?—oh, d—n the match! You called me in to talk about your wife, didn't you, not about cricket? She's weaker than I expected to find her, and she's breaking her heart over something.'

Mr. Broughton was startled, but he recovered his presence of mind quickly, only betraying his dismay by a smothered exclamation and the sudden blanching of his ruddy cheeks.

'Good Heavens—I . . . I thought her attack was of little consequence.'

'I can't say of how much consequence it is,' said Dr. Wadham, with grim sarcasm; 'that depends upon other folk. It's likely to be of paramount importance to her, poor little woman!'

The rector was not in the habit of allowing his acquaintances to pity his own family or anyone intimately connected with himself. He drew himself up to his full height, squared his chest, set his elbows back, and drew a long breath. Indignation cured his anxiety for the moment.

'My dear Wadham, you medical men are all alarmists. We have had a fatiguing season, and my wife always felt the lassitude summer leaves behind it. Anything I can do for her, of course, shall

be done immediately—there is really no need to try to frighten me into recognition of my duties and responsibilities. As for breaking hearts, that is all nonsense! you must be aware it is.'

'No, I'm not,' contradicted the doctor. 'If Mrs. Broughton isn't making herself wretched over something, why . . . I'm an idiot! You'd better find out what it is, rector; that's the best kindness you can do her.'

'You are mistaken,' repeated the rector, coldly. 'No doubt change of air would be beneficial; I will take my summer holiday.'

'And drag her about to strange places?'

'No, we might go to Rodlynn; I know of an excellent woman there who keeps a superior lodging-house.'

'Find out whether her beds and her

cooking are excellent, then; but I'm not sure I shall let Mrs. Broughton be taken away from home. Too many invalids fly to the ends of the earth in search of health, only to catch up death in their wanderings.'

Dr. Wadham went rapidly away down the road, leaving behind him the echo of a dreadful word—Death!

The rector, sitting idle by his desk, in the study which was sacred from intrusive entrances, let his head fall upon his hand as he tried to become serene, self-confident again. Had he not seen Alice ill before; had she not always recovered, thereby proving him in the right, because he had never allowed people to frighten him about her? Of course Wadham often had to rouse patients, or the nurses of patients, to fear—for carelessness, too great confi-

dence, often defeats a doctor's best skill.

'But he need not have used such a weapon against me,' thought the rector; 'in the midst of all my worries, about my son, about Purvis and his detestable conduct, harassed as I am just now, Wadham really might have spared me this.'

Sitting there he began to feel aggrieved. There seemed to be a conspiracy against his peace.

What if Wadham were not exaggerating matters this time? Supposing that his warning were not unnecessary? Why, then, there would be a vacancy in the rectory; one vacancy the less in the burial ground round the church. After an imposing ceremony, the earthly being of the rector's wife would be lost to the world. She was only an invalid; her life was spent mainly in two rooms, yet her

husband knew that her influence pervaded not only his life, but a great part of the lives of others. Death! It was a grim, awful reality, difficult to associate in thought with the little woman who clapped her hands for glee at the sight of a tom-tit! And yet this man, who was a sincere Christian, had preached often of death and the grave during a period of nearly thirty years, had told his congregation to prepare for death, not to be surprised by death, nor to dread death, which is but the beginning of a fuller, nobler, glorious life!

Now, when he had been bluntly told that his wife was perhaps very near death, he shuddered, bowed his head in his hands, felt that it was too terrible an ordeal for such a little woman to be called upon to face. He had expected that he would die

before her,—he had imagined the edifying scene of his own death-bed,—she had been beside it, of course; her place in life was to be of secondary interest in all the great scenes and vicissitudes of his! Unconsciously this egotism of belief had grown upon him, until now he could scarcely bear the thought that he would have to live and die without her, that she would be the one to die first, to go alone and face the great mystery. He trembled for her, who would not have dreamed of trembling for himself. Knowing, as he did, that God stretches His Guiding Hands to those who die loving Him, this fear of the rector's would have been sinful if it had not been so pitiably human. It was the failure of courage which brought his soul to his Maker's feet; and we may be certain that the Maker compassionated the weakness

for which the man despised himself.

'So we shall not grow old together. She is very young still, very girlish. . . . Poor little woman . . . my poor little woman! . . .'

The rector thought this first, but sterner reflections came to him. Reasoning the matter out he became certain that he had allowed himself, his softer side, to be unduly worked upon by Wadham's distressing choice of words. He even began to accuse himself of being foolishly emotional.

No doubt Wadham, whose interest was so largely centred in the forthcoming match of his cricket club, had spoken carelessly, having no regard to the manner in which his words could be taken by anyone who was over-sensitive. And he had not said, 'Mrs. Broughton will go in search of health and catch up death,'—he had merely re-

marked that this is sometimes the case with invalids.—'We will be exceptionally prudent,' said the rector to himself.

Wadham had clearly been talking foolishly, or he would not have suggested that Mrs. Broughton was breaking her heart over something—making herself wretched.

'*Wretched*?' The recter laughed; he was so sure that a happier woman than his wife did not exist.

The more he considered the words he had heard, the more did the speaker appear as an ignorant, prejudiced meddler. Once Alice begun to recover, and very likely she had begun already, she would grow well amazingly fast, because she would be watched, taken care of, as she had never been before; there should be no more imprudent attempts to walk downstairs and into the garden. And if her im-

provement did not seem sufficiently rapid, the best medical advice should be called in; to confute Wadham's theory, of course.

'There are good doctors in Rodlynn,' the rector thought, as he went upstairs to his wife's room.

At the door he paused to listen; she was singing softly to herself, singing a nursery rhyme. As though a woman whose heart was breaking, who was making herself wretched over something, would amuse herself while lying on a sick-bed by singing 'Little Jack Horner sat in a corner.'

'Ah, Alice, my dear; cheerful, that's right; nothing like good spirits for giving good health.'

She looked up, blushed at being caught in the act of singing, the pink colour mounting as quickly into her face as a

young girl's colour rises when love-words are spoken to her.

'You see, John, it isn't Sunday, or I would have sung hymns; and I can't remember anything much beside those silly little rhymes; I never had a good head for music . . . That was Dick's favourite, "Little Jack Horner,"—Anna always liked something more sensible,—"Those little hands were never meant," for instance . . . He used to cry out when I got to "sat in a corner," "Oh, no, mum, Jack's a *good* boy, he mustn't sit there!" . . . Oh, my Dick, my Dick . . . who will sing nursery nonsense to *your* babies?'

Like a cry of pain the question broke from the mother's lips, repented of as soon as uttered, wept for with scalding tears, bemoaned by sobs that shook the frail little figure and made the bed-posts quiver.

In the midst of the torrent of tears an apology was murmured brokenly.

'Oh, John . . . don't be angry . . . I'm not often so . . . so wicked . . . but I can't help . . . crying for my boy!'

The rector's face was stern and cold; he seemed to find some difficulty in speaking, —a strange experience for such a self-confident man. At last he said, and his voice was even, neither kind nor unkind,

'You would do better to pray for your boy instead of weeping, my dear. His unworthiness is, of course, a severe trial for us both.'

And he thoroughly meant what he said. If his wife was grieving about Richard, it was certainly on account of his wickedness, not of his absence.

So these two, who should have come nearer to each other on account of the

illness which threatened to make their separation, drifted farther apart, kept their souls hidden under a veil of secrecy, deceived each other for each other's good.

CHAPTER VII.

Dr. Wadham was hailed by old Mrs. Drinkwater as he passed her house on his homeward way. The aged dame's face was wrinkled into smiles; her manner and tones were ingratiating.

'Hullo! what is wrong with you?' asked the doctor, pausing in front of the open window. 'Been eating too many green apples, eh?'

'Oh, no, sir, it's few o' them I ever tastes, knowing well that forewarned's forearmed, an' remembering how many

there be ready to call you in for trifles, when your time's precious. I wanted just a tiny bit o' gossip, doctor; and I hoped maybe you'd step in and take a glass of wine,—currant wine, my own making.'

'No, mother, thanks; I'm busy to-day.'

'And how's parson's wife? I heard she'd been took with something. Dear, dear, the trouble that comes to some folk!'

'Well,' said the doctor, reflectively, 'I suppose there's no harm in my telling you that little Mrs. Broughton's been ailing a long while, and seems to have got rapidly worse.'

Mrs. Drinkwater's brilliant eyes scanned his face.

'Ah,' she answered, 'that sudden getting worse looks bad, doesn't it? So the parson'll have to find out soon how he

likes being a widower. He'll miss her at first, no doubt, just as I missed my canary bird that used to hang there by the cuckoo-clock,—it was something to pet, and its ways were pretty. It's a sad world, doctor, and no mistake!'

'Mind, I didn't tell you Mrs. Broughton hasn't long to live, so don't tell your cronies I did.'

'It comes to the same thing whether you did or did not, as far as my intelligence can see,' said Mrs. Drinkwater, sagely.

'The Lord's against him,' she muttered to herself as soon as she was alone again, meaning the rector, not Dr. Wadham; regarding Mr. Broughton as her arch-enemy she was not surprised that he should be unfortunate. Ignorant minds are very ready to believe that their petty

spites and favouritisms are shared by Providence.

The most important result of Mrs. Drinkwater's having heard of the serious nature of Mrs. Broughton's illness was that she told Mattie. The girl received the news with passionate grief, sobbing for sympathy with the sorrow she knew Dick would feel.

'He's so fond of his mother,—he thinks there isn't anyone like her in all the world! . . . Oh, god-mother, it *can't* be true! My poor dear Richard will be heart-broken!'

'Not while he has you, my love!' said the old woman, who was thoroughly bewildered by the extent of Mattie's grief. 'There, there, dry your pretty eyes. I'd no idea you'd take on so, or I wouldn't have told you.'

Mattie looked up piteously. Her pretty face was all streaked with tears, her lips were trembling.

'Dick wanted me to know his mother; he said he was sure we should love each other. Oh, why does God let people who are so good and gentle go out of a world where there aren't enough of them?'

'I should think it must be a judgment on parson,' said Mrs. Drinkwater; 'but that's nothing to do with us. If you were wise, child, you'd get Richard's mother on your side before she dies; perhaps she could persuade her husband to consent to the marriage if she took a fancy to you.'

'How can I? I never see her.'

Mrs. Drinkwater thought deeply for several minutes, looking cunning. The result was a bold suggestion.

'The parson's got to go to Mrs. Bates'

to-day some time, to see her grandchild; I heard he'd promised; well, now, if you were to watch about until Miss Anna's out of the way as well, why, you might walk into the rectory, up to Mrs. Broughton's room, and no one would stop you. Even Neptune's safe not to bark, Richard's own dog knows you too well, my pretty!'

It was about six o'clock before the rector set off for his long walk to Bates' Farm, and half-an-hour later Anna went down the village street. She had bills to pay, and purchases to make at several shops. From the Ruggles' she could not get away at once, not without appearing unsympathetic, that is to say, for Kate the talkative was in trouble about some backsliding on the part of Tom Casson. The sight of Kate in tears was so unfamiliar to Anna that she spent some time in trying

to console the girl. Alas, for feminine duplicity!—No sooner was Anna out of the shop than Kate's tears gave place to smiles. Tom's behaviour had had less to do with the weeping than had Kate's determination to help her friend Mattie.

A strange scene was taking place at the rectory.

Neptune had not barked; Jane, the servant, busy in the kitchen helping the cook, had not heard the light footsteps which had gone up the stairs.

In Mrs. Broughton's room two women were gazing at each other,—silenced for awhile by their emotions.

Mattie had tapped softly at the door, had been bidden to enter, and now stood, pausing, at the foot of the invalid's bed,—her pretty face pale, still showing traces of tears, looking not a little scared, as

though doubting the nature of the reception which awaited her.

From between the white curtains little Mrs. Broughton, who was sitting up, leaned forward.

There was such silence in the room at that moment that the sudden chiming of the church-clock without sounded appallingly loud.

Seven strokes thrilled the air.

Little Mrs. Broughton gave a low cry, —her tongue was loosened. The spell upon Mattie was at an end also,—she ran forward, bent over the bedside, caught the thin clasped hands which lay on the counterpane and kissed them passionately.

'Oh, you're so like him! . . . Don't be angry with me . . . I couldn't help loving him . . . I couldn't refuse to give my heart to him when he asked for it!'

The mother wrapped her arms about her son's betrothed. Yes, that love was a tie binding them irrevocably to each other, strong enough to overcome all minor differences. Mattie was not a lady, not her Richard's equal, the daughter of a disreputable ill-dispositioned man who was the rector's enemy,—Mattie was the cause of Dick's banishment,—but, as she loved him so truly, all else was forgiven and forgotten by the woman who had brought him into the world of trouble.

Clinging together in this way they mingled their tears happily. There was no need for any more explanation of their opinions; Mattie's impulsive cry had defined their mutual position accurately.

It was some minutes before they wanted to talk, and when they did it was without

questions and answers; they sang the praise of their dear one.

'And he is so fond of you,' said Mrs. Broughton at last, remembering to wonder that any girl should be worthy of so much. 'He has written to me, oh, my dear, such praise of you!'

'Poor Dick,' sobbed Mattie through her smiles. 'He writes to me every day. He is much too good to me, but . . . no one could love him more than I do.'

This was the one point upon which agreement was impossible. Little Mrs. Broughton smiled indulgently, but did not believe the statement. Then they both began to think of the rector, of his anger, of the manner in which they were defying his authority at the moment. But neither mentioned him.

'If I could help you how gladly would I do it! There seems no way at all.'

'There is a way in which . . . we can help ourselves . . .' whispered Mattie.

Again their eyes met; again Mrs. Broughton gave a cry,—but this time the cry was of awed delight.

'Oh . . . is it planned? . . . Did you come to tell me?'

'You won't betray us?'

'*Mattie!* Should I betray my son?'

'By accident, I meant; you won't talk in your sleep, you won't even *look* as though you knew anything?'

'No, no.'

'It can't be yet, not for a month, perhaps, but when Dick is able he will send for me, and I shall go to him. He is seeing about everything; we shall be married at a little old church in the city,

where no one will know anything. He's been turned out of home because of me, and I'll try to make home for him . . . Oh, mother . . . for you will be my mother then . . . *do* say you think I am right? He would get rich sooner without me, but he wouldn't be as happy.'

'Go to him, dear; be a true wife to him.'

'And he wants taking care of,—he catches such dreadful colds, and gets overtired so easily. I believe he's not strong; . . . like you.'

'He was delicate as a boy. I can't bear to think of him all alone in London!'

'He will not be alone long,' said Mattie, raising her head proudly. 'I've got to make up to him for all he's had to bear because of me, and, please God, I'll do it. The situation he has got is a very poor

one, but we could *just* live on his wages, at least I think we could; I should be so very economical. My father doesn't know a word about it, Dick would rather he didn't. Now I shall have to creep away, or some one will come back and find me here.'

'Kiss me, dear. I wish I could ask you to come again, but I daren't, it's so dangerous. And I may not be here long; we are going to the sea-side, to Rodlynn, I think.'

'You look very ill,' said Mattie, solemnly.

'I . . . oh, I'm only a poor, weak creature; people are very good not to think me a great trouble.'

'Here,' cried the girl, suddenly, as she pulled a card out of the bodice of her dress, 'I have just remembered, I wanted

you to have this. Dick got a man to take it one day in the fields, the man was a stranger to the place.'

It was a photograph of Richard and Mattie together, abominable as a work of art, uncomplimentary indeed. Still it served its purpose. Mrs. Broughton seized it eagerly, pressed it to her lips.

'Oh, thank you, thank you for sparing it!'

'Can you keep it somewhere safe?'

'Yes, in my locked desk, by the bed here, where his letters are.'

'Good-bye, dear Mrs. Broughton.'

'Mattie, call me "mother" again.'

'Good-bye, mother.'

When the rector came home, he found his wife sleeping peacefully, a smile on her face. Yet she started up with a cry at his entrance, stretching out both her

arms, staring into the dusk as though seeking some one not visible.

'Dick! . . . Oh, I thought I heard his step.'

'You must not be foolish, Alice, it was my step you heard. Go to sleep again.'

'Yes, John,' said Mrs. Broughton, meekly.

CHAPTER VIII.

Anna had walked to the Hollies to acquaint her dear friend Barbara with the news that her father and mother were going to the sea-side, and that she might have to accompany them.

The society of the Mornes was fascinating. Anna lingered with them this evening, though she was well aware that she ought to be at home, that Philip Hedworth would want her. The curate's time was not his own; all day he was going about his Master's work, which he would not have neglected to save his life's hap-

piness; only at night, when Trot and Jerry had been put to bed, he was in the habit of spending an hour of idleness.

As Anna stood under the trees listening to Basil's conversation, she felt a sting of reproach, remembering that, in another garden, Philip was probably walking alone and sorrowful. But in the winding alleys of *this* old-fashioned garden, lurked a sweet, intoxicating, unexplained influence.

She was not behaving well to Philip, she acknowledged this to herself; but any romantic thought seemed out of place in connection with their engagement, which, on her side at least, had proceeded from common-sense arguments alone. Of course, if she married Philip, as she knew she would, there would be plenty of time in which to listen to all the words he might care to speak to her.

And, just at present, Anna preferred listening to Basil. He was a fellow-creature who was not happy, whereas the curate was in the commonplace position of being very well contented—as far as large questions were concerned. He might be a trifle *dis*contented at the moment, truly; but moments pass away and are no more. Basil's melancholy was of the noble, attractive kind, which endures. And the scene of which Anna made herself a part was so beautiful. No wonder, she told herself, that she did not want to hurry out of it.

Barbara was fishing in a running river which encircled the island where she, her brother, and her friend stood. Not fishing with the patient care of a devoted angler, not bringing scientific knowledge to bear upon the sport, but chancing a bite—more

interested in the consciousness that she was voluntarily isolated, and that Basil and Anna were being thrown together.

Bitter thoughts attacked Barbara's brain now and again, with more effect than her barbed hook was likely to attack the trout. She was swayed backwards and forwards mentally, one moment desiring earnestly that her dearly beloved brother might find the happiness she had told Anna he lacked, the next instant foreseeing loneliness for herself if this came to pass. How, she asked herself, could she bear to take a second place permanently in his affection? What a miserable difference Basil's marriage would make in her life!

No wonder that Barbara's fly-fishing was not successful this evening! The trout were leaping across the river, the sun glinted fading shafts of light under the

floating weed, gilding the edges of the water-like leaves, dyeing the shadows a deep red-brown; moths fluttered in the spiked foliage of the willows, frogs sprang among the reeds. Glorious day was yielding sovereignty to glorious night—its ally, whose power had increased with the hours until it had assumed the position of a conqueror.

Basil himself took great pleasure in Anna's company. Barbara had forced him to consider the beauties of her friend's character, and his interest was out-growing his prudence. He had begun to tell himself that if he could cut out the curate this girl would be saved from a fate unsuited to her, and he would gain a wife who would do credit to his choice. He had begun to wish for this consummation. After all, the only danger was that his

love might grow stronger than his ambitions,—in case he failed to win Anna he resolved to throw himself utterly into the work of completing his political career; whereas, if he won her, she would help him by encouragement and sympathy! There are few deceptions easier to bring about than the self-deception of a man upon the subject of the advisability or non-advisability of cultivating the liking of a girl who has attracted him.

Except in his ambitions Basil's character belied the strength written in his face; but his desire for success was so strong that it had left its mark upon his features.

As they stood, side by side, under the trees, he looked at Anna admiringly. With the eyes of her mind she looked up to him.

'I came here to-night,' she was saying,

'because I wanted to tell you and dear Barbara about my trouble—the trouble we are in at home. My mother is ill; she has been an invalid for some years, and she seems to have become suddenly worse.'

'You are very fond of her?'

He was at work probing Anna's individuality, trying to find out its depths and possibilities, its hard and tender places.

'I . . . I do not think I have cared for her as much as I should have done; she has always preferred to have my brother with her, while I have been my father's companion.'

Open confession is good for the soul. Anna dimly realised that she had missed an opportunity. She could not have loved her mother proudly, as she had loved the rector, but she could have lavished a kind of pitying, patient tenderness upon her.

'Is she seriously ill?' asked Basil.

Anna was grateful for the interest he showed. Barbara, fishing up-stream, was an unsympathetic vision for a friend in trouble.

'I am afraid so. Dr. Wadham frightened my father about her. She is to be taken to the sea-side for change of air as soon as she is a little stronger.'

'Shall we lose you then?'

'I do not know; I hope not.'

'Mr. Hedworth will not wish you to go.'

A flush rose in the girl's face.

'Oh . . . I am afraid you must have thought it strange behaviour when I told you, so abruptly the other night, about my engagement.'

'Not at all. You did not wish me to speak of him under any false impression.

On my part I should like to explain to you that I was not going to say any harm of him: I was considering him as a curate merely, not as a man. Curates are professionally serious, I said. Is that not so?'

'They ought to be. Father has had curates who were too gay; but they did not stay long.'

'I have not told my sister that you are going to marry the curate.'

'Oh—why not?'

'You did not give me leave. I know that she will be distressed to hear it. And, forgive me for saying so, but *you* don't look particularly happy.'

'Then I ought to do so,' cried Anna. 'Mr. Hedworth is sincerely good; my father has the greatest respect for him. I must persuade Barbara to like him.'

'No doubt he is a worthy curate; Bab will fear that you accepted him out of a sense of duty.—But you will not forgive me if I say any more. Let us change the subject. Bab is going to write another book soon. Some exceedingly favourable reviews of late have inspirited her.'

'And I have read none of her later writings!'

'Poor Bab!—they are sadly cynical. She doesn't seem to have much relish for life; something has happened to disappoint her with humanity, and I don't know what it is.'

'Not even you Then she will tell no one.'

'I believe she will tell you some day, and you will be kind to her. She needs friendship.'

'Mr. Morne, do you really think *I* can help Barbara?'

The question was spoken impulsively. Anna's eyes were full of excitement and eagerness. As she had always longed to influence people for their advantage, had spent her life in ministering to the moral needs of others, she felt considerably elated by the suggestion that Barbara was not too clever to be within the power of her arguments. Basil's subtle flattery touched a deep part of her soul.

'You are so true,' said the man. 'In your mistakes, in your credulous faiths, in your gentleness, you are so very honest. When I first met you the idea came into my head that you are fitted for great things. If this should be so, is it extraordinary to imagine that you may be able

to help Bab to be true? Just at present she is a false little soul—lovable, affectionate, but not quite honest. Make her more like yourself.'

No woman is too proud to feel her heart warmed by being told that she is fitted for great things; and Anna Broughton, being so very honest, showed her pleasure plainly.

'Look at Bab now,' said Basil; 'she would make a picture, with the river for background and that red sky.'

And Anna looked and wondered. For though she admired English country, could see the beauty of a landscape fairly well when not too busy in mind to notice it, she was not in the habit of finding possible 'pictures' in her daily surroundings.

Of course she appreciated this one without difficulty. Barbara's lissom figure,

poised on a mossy stone, bent over the shallow water of the river; rod in hand, with her garden-hat hanging by its strings down her shoulders, with her hair blown into disorder, her cheeks flushed, her lips parted, she was watching the play of the fish, and a large brown water-rat sat on the opposite bank, nervously regarding her. Both rat and Barbara were in a state of suspended activity. Another instant and the animal had scudded into the reeds, while the girl had thrown out her line deftly. Barbara had begun fishing for the sake of leaving Anna and Basil together, but the spirit of sport was now upon her. All her small vexations, all her big troubles were forgotten. She was acting under the spell of a belief that, if she could only land a big trout to-night, she would never hate life again.

Over the water skimmed flies of sober hues, while the willows whispered and cast their dead leaves, making startling splashes in the deep pools. Sunset tints were shed from the sky downwards, and reflected, with a trifle less brilliance, from the shallows. Basil had taught the rector's daughter how to appreciate this scene. She thought him exceedingly clever. Philip Hedworth might have told her to notice the beauty of the sunset colours, but he would not have declared that Barbara by the river's edge made an effective picture.

Barbara did not contrive to catch a big trout this evening. Soon she came back from her standing-stone to where her brother and friend were together; as she reached solid earth again, the expectancy

went out of her face, her lips closed, she exclaimed wearily,

'A plague on those wretched fish!'

Basil laughed.

'They have given you an evening's entertainment, Bab.'

'My darling Anna, they have made me seem to neglect you!' cried Miss Morne. 'Have you been telling my old boy your troubles? I hope so.'

'Mr. Morne has been very kind.'

'Miss Broughton wants to tell some of her troubles to you, Bab,' said Basil. 'I will try my luck with the fish, until your conversation is ready to admit a third voice.'

Anna, timidly, told Barbara of her engagement.

'You can't mean it!' cried the confi-

dante. 'It is too horrible! You mustn't expect congratulations from me; among my many faults lurks the virtue of truth. Oh, you dear, silly thing, don't be so weak. You aren't in love, as a girl ought to be when she promises her all. Take a cynic's advice and throw over the curate. You only accepted him out of a sense of duty.'

'Is not that the best reason? We are only given life that we may have the chance of doing our duty. Oh, you don't know how good Mr. Hedworth is!'

'A good curate—very likely, but that isn't a reason for marrying the man. Basil will agree with me in hating the idea of such a sacrifice; you're only a tender-hearted, well-meaning girl, who has been preached at from her cradle, but who has never seen or heard of real love. My brother, poor old boy, knows what love is

worth,—so do I, only I can't find it. We are worldlings, we know that *les mariages de convenance* are sometimes necessary, but not in your case.'

'Oh, Bab, no one could call . . .'

Anna paused, blushing and amazed.

'If you mean that your marriage will be a worldly sacrifice on your part, I thoroughly agree; but can't duty be reckoned among the expediencies of your world? We serve Mammon, Basil and I, we know we have to pay him a price sometimes, whereas you serve duty. If you marry your father's curate you will pay a price to duty,—your own private fetich.'

'Oh, don't speak so!' cried Anna, in distress. 'You recognise the claims of duty too; I'm sure you do.'

'Yes, but only the duty of common-sense. Isn't your idea of duty rather

slavish? Can you honestly believe that you are bound to marry the curate because he is good? No. You aren't being true to yourself,—you're trying to gain merit by doing a false kindness,—you will make a marriage of expediency, just as surely does the penniless girl who accepts a wealthy brewer, or the moneyed woman who purchases a title!'

The glib speech dismayed poor Anna.

'There!' added Bab, quickly. 'You may quarrel with me if you choose, but I mean to speak my mind to you.'

'I should be sorry to quarrel, dear,—only I do not think I ought to listen to you!'

Anna felt that she was not behaving well to-night in any way: she wished she had not come to the Hollies, for Barbara's declaration that she was about to make a

marriage of expediency haunted her mind, and would, she knew, continue to do so.

But this regretful mood gave way before the spell of Bab's audacity. It was impossible to be angry with a girl who showed such vehement interest in her affairs.

Basil returned at this point in the conversation. Barbara appealed to him.

'Old boy, I've been arguing with this dear wrong-headed friend of mine; we can't let her ruin her life, can we? Help me to persuade her that real love isn't . . .'

'I think it would be wiser not to say any more at present, Bab. Miss Broughton may resent our interference,—though she is aware that it is well-meant.'

Anna remembered that this man had left a romance in the years he had passed through, that he was unhappy, that his

admiration she had already gained, that she longed to teach him to know the comfort of religion.

'Please do not think me rude or ungrateful?' she asked, earnestly. 'It is very kind of you and dear Barbara to care so much about my future.'

'Miss Anna told me that she may not have to accompany her parents to the seaside, Bab.'

'*Oh!*—Basil, you're a genius! I see what you mean. Anna must come to London with me.'

Anna's transparent face expressed her varying emotions exactly. A wonderful delight had been offered her; she feared she would not be allowed to accept it.

'How could I let you be . . . bothered with me?' she asked, tremulously. (Miss Broughton actually used the word 'bother-

ed'!) 'I have never stayed in London,—dear Barbara, you know how much I should like to stay with you!—only you are too good, and . . . my father . . .'

'Shall consent!' cried Bab, finishing the sentence.

This altogether unexpected invitation made Anna forget that she had decided a moment earlier that the fascination exercised over her by these worldlings was a temptation to be avoided. Probably the strongest desire of which she was conscious was her longing to see the world. A novel she had lately read had made her believe that romance may exist in a village; but her engagement was no romance, and to get away from it for a while would be a rest. The future was definitely planned out; it would consist of a marriage dictated by duty,—a marriage of expediency, Bab

had called it, but a great change, sweet excitement, a taste of freedom, would help her, she believed, to become some day a model Mrs. Hedworth. Just as Barbara had felt that should she catch a trout misfortune might for the future assail her in vain, so Anna felt now that after a visit to London she would be able to face, with a smiling countenance, her uneventful life.

'I'm going to board at Miss Hilda's,' Barbara explained, 'old Mrs. Brown, her mother, owns the house; Basil will be constantly in and out; he will take us everywhere, you shall be shown everything. My dear, the rector *shall* consent! I'll come and coax him. When you return you'll be able to tell Maycross people about the hollowness of the delights of the deceptive old world. Bah! I know

I'm sick of it, but I can't keep away from it.'

'Barbara will enjoy town, Miss Broughton, if you are with her.'

'Oh, I want to come. You cannot guess what a pleasure it would be to me!'

She was so simple that the Mornes laughed together about her eagerness; but that was when she had gone home to ask the rector to let her go to London.

Mr. Broughton was worried about his wife, so he had not as many thoughts as usual to spare for the concerns of his daughter. Beside which, he decided that, now she was engaged, it was Philip's business to prevent her from becoming worldly.

'You want a change, Anna?' he asked. 'Well, then, you might come with us to Rodlynn; but it is a fact, that lodgings

are expensive, and your mother will not need you when she has me.'

'No, father. Barbara is anxious to have me. She is so good, I should be sorry to offend her by a refusal.'

'Talk it over with Hedworth, and ask his advice, my child; you owe him some consideration. If he does not object to your going, I do not see why I should.'

That night Anna dreamed that she had reached London, and that she was living a grand life of amusement, while Philip from the clouds looked on sadly. Why he was in the clouds she did not know. At a splendid ball, where she, Anna, was the centre of attraction, some man, not unlike Basil Morne, came up to her and said,

'I always knew that you were fitted for great things.'

CHAPTER IX.

When Anna Broughton woke up next morning, after her dream, she felt that the face of the earth was changed for her, and could never regain its old aspect.

That is the feeling which a youth has when he leaves the parental home for lodgings in London and the stool of an apprentice; the youth has to become a man, to pass through the stages of manhood until old age teaches him simple truths, before he will see the earth again

as he saw it from the garden-gate of his old, long-emptied home. Perhaps he thinks then that earth has a false face, but this one aspect of it he is unable to change; the old is the best, he says to himself,—the lost was of value though he had found all else worthless. It remains, that part, as his belief; the love of it is not his least virtue.

Anna wanted to leave home. She had watched the world from over the garden-gate long enough, she was impatient of guessing at what lay beyond, in that part of earth which she could not see from that standpoint. If anyone had told her that someday she would come back to be grateful for the security, the peace of home, that the click of the latch behind her would be sweet music in her ears, she would have laughed scornfully.

The brooklet rushes to the stream, the stream hurries to the river,—the river, grown a little tired, makes its way surely but more slowly to the engulfing ocean. No doubt, if it were human, it would feel regret when it found that the possibility of being as it was in the brooklet days was denied to it for all time.

So the child longs to be a man, and the best men, in their age, become childlike.

Women, who often have their lives controlled by other lives, are seldom able to return in spirit to their young home. They are happiest when, in their fading time, they can look back to it with smiles over pleasant memories. If they have children they are happier in the youth of their children than they ever were in their own youth. This is God's gift of compensation. The world is full of promises, and

Anna believed in all that it offered her, though she did not define to herself the benefits she expected to receive from it. Having a lover, being engaged, she could not count a husband among its possible gifts. Vaguely she desired experience, as Eve did when she tasted the fruit in Eden.

London was a wonderful place, she was certain. People who lived there were gifted intellectually above others, people who had visited it were entitled to a respectful admiration when they returned to the country. The fact that she had been asked to stay in London, to be taken everywhere to see everything, at once raised her in her own estimation.

Last night she had heard her conscience whispering to her that she was not quite kind to Philip; this morning, though morning is the calmest time of the day,

her heart was beating so fast that she forgot she had a conscience. When she thought of Philip at all it was with condescension; for a girl who is soon to see the world may surely be accounted generous if she spares many thoughts to her country lover? Philip was unfortunate in that he lived in Maycross; had he come from a distance he would have received the welcome that a stranger may reckon upon; his familiar presence made no difference in coming or going over such a small radius as from cottage to rectory, from Huntstown to Maycross. Another reason why Philip did not make a success as Anna's betrothed lay in the fact, of which he was blindly proud, that he was her father's curate.

No girl takes pleasure in the fact that her lover is very much her father's property.

After breakfast Anna remembered that she was supposed to consult Philip about her visit to town. The consultation was a mere formality of course, an act of courtesy to the man she had chosen for her husband, and she did not attach sufficient importance to it to dread it, to hesitate about performing it at the earliest possible moment.

She put on her garden-hat and walked over to the cottage. Had she been going to pay a visit to old Mrs. Drinkwater or to any poor old woman of the village she would have chosen other headgear to appear in. Poor Philip was only thought worthy of a garden-hat!

Jerry and Trot were playing in the grass-plot in front of the parlour window, two tiny white-clad figures, appearing and disappearing among the flowers of the beds like cabbage butterflies. When they saw

Anna they drew up, stood side by side, clasping hands, pouting rosy lips. She was always kind to children, yet they never ran to her spontaneously.

She surprised them to-day by catching them in her arms and kissing them lavishly, without requesting any polite salutation from them.

Jerry, who always objected to social amenities which were forced from him, was so much touched by her forbearance, that he volunteered a 'Dood-mornin', Miss Bwoughton;' while Trot, putting on the self-satisfied expression of the juvenile performer, began, behind Jerry, to sing *sotto voce* her one and only hymn.

'Is papa indoors, darlings?' asked Anna.

Trot stopped singing and stared. She was not used to being interrupted in the

first verse; people as a rule had to coax her a long while before they were allowed to hear that hymn.

Jerry, who was always the spokesman, nodded his head and answered.

'Papa's witing letters. He telled us to be good, an' we *have* been weally. I only maked the big fwog jump. I didn't poke him hard.'

'Go on with your play, dears,' said Anna, 'I am going in to see your father.'

Stepping to the window she tapped, so lightly that Philip did not hear. She could see him. His head was bent low over his writing, but his pen had paused for a moment. His face was serious, with a perplexed expression, such as little Trot gained when her arithmetical lessons proved troublesome.

The second tap brought a complete

change to his expression. He sprang up, seeing Anna at the window, came forward running, and clasped her hand.

'You have come because I missed you last night. My dear, that is very good of you.'

Anna smiled.

'I have come because I want to talk to you, Philip.'

She could not help seeing some absurdity in the situation, for his delight was exuberant; the incident of her coming, so trivial in her consideration, he dignified into a great event.

As he led her into his parlour, where his babies' toys were scattered, where, upon a side-table were the remains of his frugal breakfast, he looked as happily important as a child looks when showing a friend a doll's-house. Pride was warming his

heart. He was telling himself that the pained feelings he had brought home with him last night from the desolate garden of the rectory had been altogether foolish, and unworthy of his love for her who had caused them; that Anna, instead of being cold-hearted and rather thoughtless in those matters which concerned himself, was an angel of goodness, a sweet, true woman, filled with tender sympathies.

She had known that his disappointment had been keen, and she had determined to make up to him for it.

Then the thought came to him that one day she would be his wife, the mistress of this home; it was poor enough; he saw regretfully that the morning sunshine made the threads show in the carpet, and displayed by cruel contrast the faded and bright folds of the window-curtains. But

he was fond of the little house, with that intimate fondness which only a small home can arouse; knowing every advantage of the place, and being of a naturally contented disposition, he had brought himself to believe that they out-balanced the disadvantages.

And this state of mind regarding all things constitutes a safe kind of happiness.

He wheeled the easy-chair forward for Anna, arranged the patchwork cushion for her head; it pleased him to make her sit by the open window, so that persons passing down the road might see in how much she had honoured him. There were very few persons likely to be traversing the lane at this hour, one or two tradesmen, and a working-man or so, perhaps some children, and a chance tramp, but Philip rubbed his

hands in sweet glee, thoroughly enjoying the situation.

Trot and Jerry looked back at 'papa and Miss Broughton' once or twice, but papa waved them away, smiling at them, but plainly indicating his desire that they should keep at their end of the garden, as they were ordered to do when he was 'very busy.'

Anna looked beautiful, Philip thought. Her wavy fine gold hair, which grew in that natural way low in the centre of her forehead, then rose over her white temples, to ripple low again above her ears, had caught the rich hue of the sunshine; her gray eyes had acquired new depth and expression, her mouth was no longer compressed into severity.

Paradoxically she appeared both younger and more womanly. After all, is

it not true that the charm of mature girlhood is its combination of the child and the woman?

She saw that Philip was admiring her.

He saw that she was happy.

As a lover,—lovers are usually foolish,—he was perhaps to be pardoned for believing gratefully that he had some concern in her happiness, that she was sharing his delight in that he and she were together.

'You were busy, Jerry told me, and you see I have come to disturb you.'

'The letters can be written this evening. Not finding you at home yesterday I ought to have come back and have written them then, but I kept on hoping you would return.'

'I was at the Hollies,' explained Anna.

Philip's happy confidence received a small shock upon hearing this, for Anna

had evidently left him lonely in the garden on purpose; while he had imagined that some of her poor friends had forcibly detained her. Still, as he was not an exacting man, he soon persuaded himself that she had been quite right, and he wrong.

'Of course I should have remembered that we are both busy in the day, and have to pay our visits in the evenings. No doubt Miss Morne would like to see a great deal more of you than she can do.'

'Yes,' Anna assented. 'She wants me to go and stay with her in London while father and mother are at Rodlynn: and father is willing for me to go;—I have only waited to consult you before making any definite arrangements. I felt that that was due to you.'

She was conscious that this was dutiful

of her, and that Philip had every reason to be grateful.

He was.

'My darling, if the excitement and change will please you, I am glad you should go.'

This was reasonable.

'It will be very pleasant,' she said, demurely, meaning that it would be glorious, entrancing! 'You see, Philip, I have never had an opportunity to see everything that is best in London, and to meet the best people. An experience such as I shall have is of the greatest possible value to any girl. I shall make a special point of visiting the exhibitions, particularly the one at Kensington. When I come home I shall give my Class an account of them all.'

She meant Philip to be respectful, and

he did not disappoint her; indeed, he seldom did, when her expectations were at all reasonable.

'I cannot help wishing, selfishly, that we could see all the sights together, Anna,' he said, smiling deprecatingly. 'I meant to show them to you . . . some day . . . but I know you will write to me, and I will accompany you in spirit.'

'Yes, I will write often,' she promised. 'I wonder how it is, Philip, that you have lived in London and yet have never told me a word about it—only that you had a very poor parish to work in?'

'Descriptions are unsatisfactory as a rule, dear, especially descriptions of sights.'

'Barbara lodges in a friend's house; I do not know in which part of London, but it is sure to be somewhere fashionable. It

was very kind of her to ask me, was it not, Philip?'

'You cannot expect me to think so.'

'If father and mother do not start for another week I shall have enough time to prepare: there are so many things to do. Barbara is going in a day or two, I believe.'

'There are dresses to be made?' said Philip, sagely.

'Barbara cannot be happy for long in the country. It is natural that people who are used to the constant excitement of town life should wonder how we can endure perfect quiet.'

'Only God made the country and man made the town.'

'Well, God made man, and taught him to make the town.'

'My dear, I did not mean to deny that

towns are necessary. I think the nearer we are to Nature the nearer to God, but it is most pleasant to think of London as a place where nearly all the good and great men of history have worked. If the stones of the city walls could speak, what graphic, heart-stirring accounts of noble lives we should hear! But some minds aren't strong enough to bear the continual noise and fret. I know that I found great difficulty in being good in London. The everlasting hurry gives no time for reflection, for self-study.'

'On the other hand, do not people who live in the country study themselves too much? Are they not in danger of becoming selfish?'

'We have been warned that we must watch and pray—watch unceasingly.'

'But work *is* prayer.'

'It is an open question whether work without prayer is or is not worthy: we don't praise a dumb man for not swearing, and the good deed which is done out of habit, without humble search for God's will, without prayer, may be less good in His sight than a prayer without work.'

'The world would not be benefited largely at that rate!' cried Anna, impatiently.

'That seems to me to be doubting the effect of prayer.'

'Oh, I am not as good as you are, Philip. I should dearly like to work, to accomplish something, but I should feel that my life was wasted if I sat still and prayed all day.'

'I'm not good at all, dear,' cried the

curate, distressed that she, in her generosity, should think him better than he was. 'My health broke down in London. I fear that I became querulous and a grumbler. In the country men ought to be saints, considering the blessings they receive hourly. My darling, don't you feel very near to God when you see the sunset?'

Anna looked at her lover thoughtfully. He was an enigma to her in reality, but she thought him very transparent. Those problems which we discard as too simple for our wits to deign to consider are often those our wits could not, at greatest stress, comprehend.

'There is a certain emotional effect about sunset, as there is about moonlight, and I suppose one thinks unconsciously of the many poems that have been written about God in Nature. Yet the highest

order of creation is man; so human nature must be the nobler study.'

'Yes, I admit that,' Philip answered. 'It is a terribly difficult study though. I have often felt unfitted for it. If it were not that He gives strength, limits the calls upon one to those which one can answer prayerfully, does not try the worker beyond his strength, and has compassion upon one's weakness, I should have been utterly discouraged often. I have wanted to explain this to you, dearest. The other evening when we were together I was troubled about my incapacity; I had been talking with an atheist—and I fancied that there was some slight constraint between you and me, which no doubt proceeded from my want of candour. If I confide in you, dear heart, you will give me your confidence in return, will you not? We are

going to help each other all through our lives, and we must have no secrets from one another.'

'Oh, Philip, how solemn you are this morning! Do you think I am weighed down by many secrets? We have known each other so long that the confidence is established already!'

Grace had entered the room. Anna had heard her approach, and had returned a laughing answer to her lover's appeal, because she did not wish to be serious in the presence of a third person. There was danger that Grace might think that Philip had been delivering a grave rebuke.

Anna laughed aloud; her voice had a cheerful ring in it as she explained to the curate's sister:

'We have been having a discussion as to the noblest work possible to man,

Grace. I consider that it is the study of human nature; what do you say?'

Grace pursed up her mouth, and glanced from her brother's face to Anna's, then back again, then out of window.

'The *bettering* of human nature, perhaps; —I do not know why anyone should wish to *study* anything as contemptible.'

'Some faulty natures are so grand in spite of their failings.'

Anna was thinking of Basil Morne.

Philip turned his mild face towards his sister.

'My dear Grace, could it be right for us to consider other people contemptible, without pausing to see the unworthiness in ourselves? If we saw ourselves as others see us we might feel more tolerant of the faults and follies of others.'

'Copy-book morality is admirable, bro-

ther. We have been told to take the beam out of our own eye first, but we were never ordered not to see the beams in the eyes of our . . . relatives and friends.'

She felt that the use of the word 'brother' in this case might convey even to humble Philip that her sarcasm was intended to be applicable to himself. All the years they had shared a home they had failed to sympathise, and, because he knew this, Philip was continually endeavouring to soften the harsh attitude of her mind. Needless to say, he failed; for women of Grace Hedworth's age do not grow sweeter-tempered unless they first become humble, and it was her brother's genuine humility which provoked her anger. To think badly of oneself appeared

to her as an admission of imbecility, constituting a standard of opinion which others would lower, not raise.

Philip sighed.

CHAPTER X.

Philip had not yet solved the difficult question what was to become of Grace when he married, unless indeed his wife would look upon her as a sister. Lately he had feared that Anna would not be unjust if she refused to do this. Grace had no money. And Grace, knowing that the doubt was an anxiety to him, took malicious pleasure in avoiding all conversation upon the subject of the future.

'It was very kind of Anna to come here this morning,' said Philip, breaking an awkward pause. He wanted his sister to

speak some amiable words of welcome to his betrothed.

'Dear me, I thought engaged people always were miserable away from each other! Probably Anna was counting the hours until she could spare time to come and see you, brother. By the bye, Anna, I don't think I have expressed my pleasure that you've consented to marry Philip, have I? You see, as an affectionate relative of the man's, I naturally think you an exceedingly fortunate girl, so my congratulations must be unusually sincere. It will be so nice for you to live always in your father's shadow, as one may say.'

'Thank you,' Anna answered, after some hesitation.

'Oh, don't trouble to thank me!' Grace went on, in the sprightly tone she adopted when she felt extraordinarily disagreeable.

'I'm going to be your sister, you know, and sistership is famed for its frankness and want of ceremony.—Have the children been introduced to Anna as to their new mamma?'

'No; there . . . is plenty of time.'

'I am very fond of the dear little souls.'

Philip's face brightened.

'Look there,' Grace went on, 'do you see how, in the midst of their game, Trot keeps on staring back at this window? That is because my brother here promised her that he would buy her a new blue ribbon for her hair when he walked through Maycross this morning to the Young Men's Club.'

'Poor little woman!' murmured the father.

'Avarice is largely developed in Trot's character,' Grace added, in the tone of an

instructor; 'she has an enormous bump of acquisitiveness; there seems to be danger that she may be miserly in her old age.'

'What is the new blue ribbon for? Is to-morrow any special occasion?' asked Anna.

'A tea-party, in the earwiggy summer-house in the meadow; there are to be nearly a dozen of the ragged children of the village, and they will give one another mumps, measles, etc., etc. It is my brother's arrangement, nothing to do with me—I assure you.'

'To-morrow is my little girl's birthday,' explained Philip.

Anna felt sorry for him, for she saw a worried look on his face, such as it often showed after he had been long subjected to the lashing of his sister's tongue.

'If you were going to your club you must not let me keep you, Philip,' she said, more gently than she had yet spoken to him.

Emboldened by her manner, he looked into her eyes proudly and eagerly.

'If you . . . would walk with me? . . . Would you dislike it, dear?'

The colour deepened in Anna's cheeks. He was asking her to publicly announce that he and she were engaged. Every gossip of the neighbourhood would know what it meant to see the rector's daughter walking all morning by the side of the curate. But by the knowledge that people would talk of her Anna had never allowed herself to become flurried or made diffident; she had always done conscientiously that which she had thought her

duty, and so had been able to face, if not to ignore, public opinion.

The public was not a large one, but its opinions were decisive.

Grace, who was watching Anna, saw the blush, and made a shrewd guess as to the nature of her thoughts.

'I hope you are aware what a stupendous honour you are requesting, brother.'

'Anna knows that I am.'

'I will gladly accompany you,' said Anna, stung into compliance by his meekness and his sister's acidity. 'I wanted to call upon Mrs. Ruggles; I will walk with you as far as you are going and pay my visit on my way home.'

While Philip fetched his hat and the gloves which were to show respect for his companion, Grace entertained Anna with

an account of her own struggles to keep down the weekly bills, the exact number of poultices Trot had required during her last illness, the difficulty experienced in keeping Philip's clothes tidy when he would forget to take care of them.

'His coat is shiny all down the back, as I daresay you may have noticed, because he will lean against the table edge or the wall when he addresses his young men at the club. I've told him of it again and again, yet uselessly. He has the same trick in the pulpit. And he won't turn up his wristbands when he plays with the children. I often catch him with his hand in the water-butt, sailing paper boats, or inches deep down the ground planting roots or burying pets. It's a great trial when a man is so forgetful.'

'Oh, you are telling Anna all my faults!'

said Philip, playfully, as he came into the room again.

'Oh, dear no, I haven't had time,' said Grace.

Anna was glad to be out of the cottage.

As she walked beside the curate down the lane, she noticed that he stole a proudly possessive glance at her every other moment. His face was radiant, so that any person passing could read his pride just as easily as could Anna.

When she looked at him she did not feel exultant, for he was very shabby, and there was a large inkspot on his collar. When she became his wife she would have to try to manage the money-affairs so as to provide better clothes for him; but she feared that the man who can never remember, without looking, whether he is wearing his Sunday or his week-day

coat, is a being impossible to keep presentable.

Her enthusiastic sensations of joy in the day's sunshine had sobered down now. Excited happiness had been chilled by the consideration of very prosaic annoyances. Philip was walking close to her, in the seventh heaven of delight; but she found the lane dusty.

He confided in her his desire to buy a birthday present for Trot.

'It must be something useful, or Grace will scold me, but it must as well be something my little girl will like.'

'Why not buy her a small work-box?'

'Can I get one for eighteenpence? I ought not to spend any more upon it.'

'Yes, you can, at the draper's; a simple

little wooden one with a picture on the lid, and cottons and tapes inside.'

'The very thing!' cried Philip. 'Trot pricks herself when she sews, but she loves to do it all the same. She was quite content all day yesterday over the manufacture of a petticoat for a doll, but she lost her needle on the rubbish-heap in the garden, and though I tried to find it for her I could not: and that put a stop to the work, for Grace will not give her more than three needles a week. My dear Anna, you have a sweet, womanly mind.'

At the draper's shop, Philip begged Anna to help him make his purchases. He asked to see some work-boxes, fell in love with them all, from the largest downwards; could not make up his mind whether Trot would prefer a picture of

highly-coloured fruit, of magenta roses and blue ferns, or of a robin on a branch; finally he asked Anna's opinion. She chose the robin.

Then the thimble had to be tried on Philip's little finger, for which purpose he peeled off his very stiff new glove. Then he cast covetous eyes upon a needle-case, price fourpence three farthings, and persuaded the shop-keeper, by telling him that to-morrow was Trot's birthday, to put in the case for twopence extra.

The ribbon had to be purchased next. The father knew the exact shade of blue which he preferred upon his little girl's golden locks, and was a long while deciding between the merits of 'satin or corded.'

'After all, satin has such a way of slipping off her hair,' he said, thoughtfully.

'I will take three-quarters of a yard, of this one, if you please.'

Anna made a purchase too.

She brought a pretty little fancy handkerchief across the shop to show the curate. It was of white silk, with a pale pink edge and the initials, 'M. H.' worked in the corner.

'That is for the dear little soul, with my love,' she said. 'Will you have it put in the parcel for me?'

'You are too kind,' cried Philip, delightedly. 'But wouldn't "T H" be better.'

'Her name is Mary.'

'But we always call her Trot. Grace did not like it at first, but she fell into the way also by degrees.'

The exchange was effected, and they left the shop.

They were a long way down the street when Philip stopped.

'What is the matter?' Anna asked in surprise.

'I must go back to the draper's, dear; the man made a mistake in reckoning up the bill.'

Some women who were going by stopped to listen, whispering comments upon the fact that the curate and Miss Broughton were out together.

'Is it anything of importance?' Anna asked.

She felt a dread of Philip's intention; she had a strong loathing for being made to look ridiculous. Several small children had crept up to find out what was being talked about.

Philip unrolled the parcel, took out the highly-coloured box, the silk handker-

chief, the needle-case, and the piece of blue ribbon. Then he found the bill.

'Three-quarters of a yard, corded, at sixpence the yard, would be fourpence half-penny, not fourpence three-farthings.'

'That is only a farthing difference! You *can't* go back and make a fuss about a farthing!'

'My dear, it would be for the sake of the principle, not for the value of the farthing. If the loss happened to be on the side of the shopkeeper I should consider myself culpable if I did not go back, so why——'

'As it is not, you must let it pass this time, Philip . . . . don't make us the laughing-stock of the place.'

He was amazed when in her whisper he heard tones of angry mortification. It

had not occurred to him that his behaviour had been likely to cause amusement.

'Dearest, there is nothing to be ashamed of,' he said, reassuringly, as he spoke stuffing the purchases into the broken paper again, so that they were partly visible, and putting the whole in his outer pocket. 'If there was any suspicion of cheating it would be directed against the shop-man; it was not I who made the mistake. But I am certain it was a most innocent error.'

This he added aloud, in order to defend the man from possible reprobation.

'Let us go on,' said Anna.

She was indignant. Captain Purvis had just passed them, and had cast amused glances at her companion, whom he had saluted.

Philip Hedworth's conscience did not pinch him at all; he had a vague idea that Anna was displeased, but could not imagine that he had offended her.

When they parted at the door of the Young Men's Club,—an institution of the curate's, for which he worked zealously,—he told her a little wistfully that he had spent a delightful morning, and that she had been most sweetly kind to him.

Anna went home quickly, without going to see Mrs. Ruggles. It was not until that night, when Philip heard his sister's comment upon his account of the morning's incidents, that he began to understand that his betrothed was a trifle ashamed of him.

'You made a mistake, brother,' Grace said, icily. 'Anna Broughton is one of the vainest young women I ever met, and,

as do most girls, she calls her vanity pride. If you want her to care for you you will have to pull yourself together, and make an effort, and show her that she can be proud of you.'

'Of me—I am not worth it.'

'No,' said Grace, 'but if you don't want to be a constant vexation to the girl who, for some inexplicable reason or other, has promised to marry you, you will have to turn over a new leaf in that respect.'

CHAPTER XI.

The progress of events at Maycross was not generally rapid, so, when any occurred in quick succession, the village folk felt themselves indebted to the people who had made history.

Maycross tongues already owed a great deal of pleasurable labour to the Broughton family. In all villages the rectory is kept under a strong focus, the vicissitudes of its home-life are made into striking pictures by the active minds of its neighbours; and the Broughtons were to Maycross what Her Majesty is to Windsor.

Everything that happened at the rectory was known to Maycross within twelve hours. This gave the people a proprietary feeling regarding it. If a stranger had told them that the affairs of the rector's private life were no concern of theirs, they would have accused the impertinent person of a want of truthfulness.

The second and third weeks of July were ever afterwards red-letter weeks in the village annals—as long, at least, as an aged inhabitant lived who could remember them. That is the country limit to 'ever afterwards.' In the first place, the rector's daughter had become engaged. This in itself was an absorbing interest. Secondly, she had become engaged to her father's curate—who thus supplied a separate excitement. Then it became known that Mr. and Mrs. Broughton were going away for

some weeks, owing to the latter's ill-health. The wedding was certain; and a funeral was by no means improbable.

Country-people take pride in all ceremonies, from the procession of Guy Fawke's day to the Assizes, from the christening of a baby to the Harvest Festival, but they feel most pride in a grand funeral. Nothing exceeds in their opinion the importance of the journey which man makes last of all and unconsciously; nothing satisfies them more than the pomp and grandeur which mourning relatives grant to the poor body which has done for ever with the gauds of earth.

When it was known that Doctor Wadham had spoken words which had actually alarmed the rector, there was scarcely a creature in the county who did not look upon Mrs. Broughton as virtually dead.

The responsibility of a popular village doctor is immense and far-reaching.

'I saw the poor dear rector go by my shop this morning,' Mrs. Ruggles would announce to her cronies, 'and I said to myself, Ah, for all you bear up that brave I know that you're under a load of trouble.'

'Ay,' some gossip would answer, with mournful eagerness, 'and I see'd Miss Anna go smilin' down the lane! D'you think, m'am, it's likely as the weddin' e'll come off this year? I shouldn't myself.'

At the end of the second week of July the Broughtons went away. Before this the news had been extensively canvassed that Miss Anna was going visiting to London. Opinions differed as to her dutifulness or want of dutifulness. Mrs. Ruggles declared that the 'poor young thing couldn't do any good by staying at

home.' Kate said, 'Well, ma, if you was dying in seaside lodgings I wouldn't go galivanting, though I'm thought a gay one.'

Many of the other Maycrossians said, 'Miss Anna never did have no natural feelings; though she be a good housekeeper, and works well in the parish.'

A large amount of sympathy went out to the curate. He was obliged to say good-bye to his betrothed, knowing that she was going to be exposed to the evil effects of town life; he probably knew that his marriage would not come off within the year; and upon his shoulders would fall the entire weight of the management of the parish during the rector's absence.

Philip Hedworth did carry a grief about with him, but no one but Grace guessed its true nature.

She did not give him much comfort or encouragement. On the evening when Anna went away he was much depressed in spirits, tried to smile at his own weakness, and said, gently,

'Grace, you will have to scold me.'

'It wouldn't do you any good, so I shall not waste my breath,' she answered; 'only, mark my words, the sooner you realise that Anna Broughton's not coming back in a hurry, unless she's obliged to, the sooner you will show that you've a little common-sense left in your head. And the chances are that, when she does come back, *you* won't have any reason to be particularly thankful.'

But this was at the end of the day; the morning had events of its own.

Quite early, after breakfast, Mattie Purvis went to see her friend Kate.

Their conversations always began with an examination of the turquoise ring. Kate loved to handle the trinket, though it would not fit upon any one of her fat fingers. It was proof positive that Mattie was engaged to a gentleman.

Then Mattie would produce Dick's last letter—they were always lengthy—and would read annoyingly fragmentary sentences from it.

When these were concluded, accompanied by many blushes and exclamations, they began to talk about the modern history of the village.

'Kate, dear,' cried Mattie, leaning her elbows on the ledge of the shop-window and staring through the glass, over the pies and cakes, 'I've come to spend a long while here, because I want to see them go by to the station.'

'Them' meant the Broughtons. Kate did not need any explanation. When the carriage came in sight, an open fly from the inn, Mattie's eyes filled with tears.

Little Mrs. Broughton was lying back among cushions; her white face looking absurdly childish in comparison with the womanly appearance of her daughter, who sat beside her. She was smiling, but the smile was evidently a conscientious performance of duty.

'Oh, Kitty, the poor dear does look bad! . . . You sweet, you darling, you're fit to be my hero's mother!' apostrophised the excited girl. 'Come home again stronger—oh, *do* get well! I shall write and tell him how sweet you look, with your pretty face half hidden under that hideous bonnet!'

Very feminine was Mattie's mind. Mrs.

Broughton's antiquated grandmotherly bonnet typified all the slights Mrs. Broughton had ever suffered.

'She's turning her head round for a last look at the old house,—it's likely enough to be quite her last,' said Kate. 'There's the look of death in her face. See, Mattie, she's asked the driver to stop a minute . . . Ah, the rector's looking at his watch . . . He thinks they'll miss the train, but they're in good time . . . There, he's told the man to drive on—I knew he would.'

'The poor darling shan't go without my saying good-bye to her!' cried the younger girl, wildly.

Acting solely upon impulse, she snatched a pink rose from a vase on the counter, and rushed out, down the road, after the carriage. What cared she that her small world would gossip over her action?—

that the rector frowned and Anna looked horrified? Her good impulse carried her through the ordeal of facing their unsympathetic faces. Besides, she had eyes for only one face—that of the woman who had been kind to her, upon whose bosom she had sobbed, Dick's mother. The pink rosebud fell in Mrs. Broughton's lap.

'Good-bye . . . God bless you . . . Come back stronger, *you dear!*'

The rector could not prevent the incident, though he hated it.

'Good-bye!' cried his wife, her cheeks and eyes brightened with pleasure.

She clasped the rose till its thorns cut through her glove into her hand, but its touch gave her nothing but pleasure.

'We must hope that this is intended as a demonstration of the young woman's repentance,' said the rector.

His wife did not answer, but her trembling fingers fastened the rose very securely in her black lace mantle.

Mattie had gone back to the shop; she still gazed after the carriage, still spoke aloud to its one occupant who was dear to her.

'If only you knew, darling, that I am going to him! you'd send him your love, you'd give us both your blessing, wouldn't you?'

'Oh, Mattie, has it really come to that?' asked Kate, in an awe-stricken tone.

Mattie nodded solemnly.

'It soon will. You don't think I'm *afraid*, do you?'

'No, but . . . it's a great step . . . That's what mother always says about getting married, even when everything's straightforward. What on earth will your

father say? He hates the Broughtons like poison.'

'He's come to some kind of terms with the rector; I think he's agreed not to hold any more meetings, during church hours, on the Green, so long as the rector withdraws the summons. I'm not sure, I don't understand about the law and all that,—only I heard there was some arrangement.'

'All the same, I don't believe he'll let you marry Mr. Richard.'

'I shall find out, before I tell him I'm going to marry Dick,' said Mattie the diplomatist.

Then the day went on until evening came, and with it Anna's departure. Then the curate told his sister that he deserved a scolding because he was very downhearted, and Grace predicted that when Anna did come back he would not have

any particular reason to be thankful.

Trot and Jerry found out that papa had a headache that night. His fairy-tales lacked spirit.

Maycross missed the Broughtons terribly. The remainder of July was a dull time for the village.

The curate performed a wonderful amount of work, and had no time to pay calls;—the Mutual Improvement Society met without Miss Anna's supervision, and gave the lie to its name. The Mornes, brother and sister, were away, in the far-off city with the rector's daughter, and Mr. Reginald Calkin was of no interest to anyone.

The weather was hot and sultry.

Mrs. Drinkwater sent every other day to the rectory to enquire whether any news had been received there as to the state of

Mrs. Broughton's health, and received such unsatisfactory reports as that 'She was no worse.' . . . 'A slight improvement had taken place.' . . . 'She was enjoying the sea-air.' . . . 'She was feeling the enervating influence of the heat,' etc., etc. Later, the housekeeper at the rectory was told, by letter, to prepare the house for the home-coming of the family; then the order was countermanded;—the Broughtons were not coming home yet.

Had the Maycross people known that all this while a secret love-affair was flourishing in their midst, they would have felt that there was yet left them a deserving topic for discussion; but Kate Ruggles, though an inveterate gossip, made a great effort, and abstained from giving even a hint regarding the progress of her friend's romance.

By this time Mattie had found out that her father's sentiments towards the rector had undergone no change, had only strengthened. It was true that in order to avoid the penalty of the law he had agreed not to hold any more Socialist meetings outside the church on Sunday mornings; but the concession, dictated by prudence, had left a bitter taste in the captain's mouth. He again declared his intention of 'being even with the rector.' Being a man of energy, he no sooner formed his intention than he made every endeavour to carry it out.

CHAPTER XII.

'MATTIE, my girl,' said the captain, one night, when he had found his pretty daughter smiling apparently at nothing, 'are you still carrying on with that young Broughton?'

Her wide-open eyes of alarm made him add,

'Because, if you are, I've not the ghost of an objection.'

'I didn't think you'd like it, dad,—but I . . . oh, I do love him so, and he loves me!'

She ran forward, knelt on the edge of

his arm-chair, and laid her head on his breast, stroking his face coaxingly as she had done in her baby-days.

The captain at home was picturesque and pleasant. Having been born a gentleman, he had kept his knowledge how to behave like one, for the edification of his family, which consisted of one daughter only. All his parental affection was therefore lavished upon Mattie. Rough he had been to her at times, yet she never changed the opinion she had once expressed that she would not exchange 'dad' for the father of any other girl, no, not for the rector himself!

Now, crying upon his breast was a real consolation to her. His sentiments were complex: at the root of them lay his desire to annoy Mr. Broughton.

'You love him and he loves you,—it's

mutual, then! Does he mean to marry you in spite of his father's no, eh, my girl?'

Mattie sat up, tossed her curls out of her wet eyes, and asked, cautiously,

'You won't try to stop it if I tell you our plan?'

'No, lass, not I.'

'We're going to be married the day after to-morrow, in London, at a church in the city.'

Stupendous was the information. Mattie gave it proudly.

The captain screwed his mouth into a twist in his endeavour to hide his satisfaction, for a father is expected to show some resentment towards the want of docility exhibited by a child who is going to be married in two days' time without parental sanction.

'Dad, you're glad!'

Mattie understood him better than he knew.

'Well, my dear, I . . . I want my girl to marry a gentleman; poverty don't count for much, as long as he's a reasonable young chap and willing to work.'

'Dick has been *slaving* for eighteen shillings a week!'

'I'll help him to get more than that. From what I've heard of the young man, he's spirited, has always been inclined to kick over the traces?'

'I don't like that last way you put it, dad. Richard is a man, and he naturally resented being treated as a boy. His father has never been fair to him, his mother can only love him, and his sister, —oh, she's prim. He has never had his chance at home.'

'And you were going to run away from me, you minx?'

'Yes, dad.'

'And he told you not to tell me?'

'No; he said I was to consult my own judgment.'

'Here's a pretty state of things to find in one's own home!' exclaimed the captain. 'Something like sitting down unexpectedly on a wasp's nest! My own little girl consults her own judgment and decides not to trust me! . . . There, there, my dear, don't cry, I didn't mean you to take my remarks too seriously.'

'I was going to leave a letter behind for you. God-mother would have given it to you.'

'Ha ha! so old mother Drinkwater was in the plot? Wily old fox! She hates the parson as well almost as I do.'

'Dick can't help being the rector's son.'

'No, Mattie, or I reckon he would. But about the marriage; you are sure he means to do the thing in proper fashion, there's no deception?'

'*Father!*'

'Young men have deceived before, Mattie.'

'Richard is the very soul of honour!'

'Then he'll suit me; we shall be sure to get on together. I shall run up to town to-night and see him. If I find it's all square, why then I'll give my girl away. You shall have a new frock, ready-made, and a bonnet out of Regent Street. You shan't be able to say that you ran away from me, my dear.'

Mattie was not certain that she was so thankful for this as she would have been.

The glory seemed to have been robbed from her romance now that her father shared it, her pleasurable excitement in arranging for her escape had been dissipated, rendered unnecessary. Yet she knew it was better for her father to be willing to call Richard son, particularly if he would really show Dick how to earn more than eighteen shillings a week. Then Mattie began to wonder what sort of hat the captain would bring from Regent Street, and how she could get the village dressmaker to alter the ready-made frock without having it talked about in Maycross.

Richard Broughton was greatly surprised when Captain Purvis called upon him, but their interview was satisfactory to them both. The captain could play the broken-down gentleman well upon occasion, infusing pathos into his smile; eloquence

poured from his tongue, and every worn button of his ancient frock-coat suggested past grandeur and present misfortune.

Nothing was said then about the change of occupation which was to increase Dick's income.

The young man felt certain that the captain had been much maligned by Maycross gossip, cruelly treated by many persons. They clasped hands at parting in quite an affecting manner.

'Be good to my little girl, young sir,' said the father, hoarsely. 'She's all I have in the world, now her mother's gone to the happy land where the loaves and fishes are sure to be multiplied into sufficiency. I may be a kind of a vagabond, an outcast upon the face of the earth, forgotten by society, but you see I remember my Bible. Eighteen shillings a week is

not much to marry upon, but we'll trust, as do the ravens. My Mattie's worth more than gold and silver. Did I understand you to say you'd got a license?'

'No, we've been called in church, St. Neot's, in Penwey Lane, for three Sundays running.'

'Ah!' the captain sighed profoundly, 'that makes me think of my own wedding, only then I married a young woman out of a cook-shop, who wasn't what the world calls a lady. She wasn't my equal, poor, dear soul, but she did well enough, and Mattie's the equal of anyone. If you're asked, Richard, don't forget that my regiment was the 102nd, Carabineers. You'll have no reason to be ashamed of your wife, bless you both!'

'Ashamed of *Mattie?* No, no, sir! I may live to be ashamed of myself, though

I hope not, but I'll never be such a scoundrel as to leave off being proud of her!'

'I've had to bear a good deal one way and another,' added the captain. 'There have been influential persons,—I won't mention names,—who had it in their power to acknowledge my personal superiority over my circumstances, but they did not see the matter in that light, and I bear them no more malice than is natural in a man of spirit and refined sensibilities. You will perhaps forgive me if I say that I am happy to aid in your revolt against tyranny. As a Socialist I have been a hater of tyrants all my life, upon principle.'

'It is a great grief to me that Mattie should be exposed to insult from members of my family!' cried Richard, who was hot in the face. 'My father and sister have

spoken of her in a way that cut me to the heart. But my mother loves her. And my mother is worth more than all the others. Besides, I mean to make up to the dear girl for everything.'

'Your father is not appreciative, Richard. I have noticed before that deficiency in his character.'

The hand-squeeze was repeated, and Dick and the captain parted; the former returned to his evening occupation of beautifying his lodgings by means of art muslin and cheap pictures, that the rooms might look pretty for Mattie; the latter went to the small grey church of St. Neot's, Penwey Lane, to ascertain that Dick's statement regarding the banns had been founded on fact. All formalities had been observed.

The young man's character for veracity

was vindicated, and Mattie's father went home satisfied.

The journey did not cost him anything, for in the train he met three young gentlemen fresh from college, with whom he played cards. One of the three won slightly, which gratified him, but the others lost heavily.

Mattie's wedding-day came at last, but the sky was not bright when she reached London. This fact troubled her a little, until her father told her that the day was a brilliant one for the city. And it made her happy to know that Dick and she were going to encourage each other to bear all the disagreeables of life.

The ready-made frock was a success, the hat a masterpiece of real art, for the captain had not forgotten the canons of good taste, as applied to dress.

When Mattie entered the dark church she did not notice its gloom and dirt, she saw only Dick.

The turquoise ring was on her finger, she would soon have another ring, and, strange to say, her preference would be for the plain gold one! Round her neck by a ribbon hung a coral heart, the gift of faithful Kate Ruggles, who had sobbed over her that morning. Kate would have been her dear friend's bridesmaid but for the claims upon her of the shop. The rector's family were good customers; business had to come before inclination. Kate sacrificed her friendship's longings, just as many a tenant has to sacrifice his political opinions.

It is doubtful whether a single Briton could be found who would declare his lot an absolutely free one, yet we know

that this is a land of freedom, and that Britons never will be slaves.

The ceremony in St. Neot's did not take long; there were other ceremonies waiting their turn, and Richard and Mattie had kissed each other, and been duly blessed by the captain, in the vestry, before Big Ben had announced mid-day.

'Oh, Dick!' whispered Mattie, 'my ears do burn so; I'm sure someone is thinking of us. I wonder if it can be your dear mother?'

'Bless her!' cried Richard. 'No doubt she is. I believe she very seldom leaves off thinking of me, and now you belong to me, my darling.'

The rector was not mentioned; Anna was forgotten.

The captain looked benevolently at the newly-married pair.

'I say, would you like to go a trip to some nice select sea-side place? Herne Bay, for instance, or Hove, if you like gaiety? Here's a cheque, my boy;—not for as much as I'd like it to be,—but the widower's mite may bring a blessing on you.'

'You're very good, sir,—I'd like to thank you better, only the words get into my throat and stick there. Mattie, my darling, what do you say? Shall we go out of London?'

'Let us keep the cheque for a rainy day, Dick. You won't mind, father?'

The captain assured them that he had no wish in the matter. A rainy day! Poor children! They were facing life with such bright faces, and they believed that none of its storms could ever wreck the edifice of happiness they had entered

to-day together. Mattie meant to spend her father's cheque upon warm clothes for Richard; she recalled the warning his mother had given her about the necessity of taking care of his chest when the winter came.

After leaving the captain they took a cab to their home.

'Dick,' whispered the bride. 'I hope you didn't want to go to Herne Bay or Hove? I'd far rather go to your lodgings than to any place in the world, for I've fancied you in them until I seem to have seen every bit of furniture and the very pattern of the carpet!'

Richard answered, as lovers mostly do in such cases. When Mattie saw the lodgings she found that the bits of furniture were not many, and that the carpet had long ago parted with a pattern, but

she declared, and honestly believed, that the rooms and the contents were exactly as she had seen them in her imagination.

The pictures delighted her—she and Dick went the round of them as though they were 'doing the Academy;' and the art muslin was more beautiful in her eyes than brocade or tapestry. Of a certainty, if love had not been woven into it, love had knocked in its nails!'

The first meal together, a kind of lunch, was very wonderful to them both. Richard had bought a bottle of champagne, two peaches, and some apple-puffs. Kate had provided the cake; no doubt she had mixed in with the raisins some honest tears. There was an M in pink sugar on the top. Dick ate that pink sugar,

and Mattie ate a scarcely-visible R in candied peel, which Kate had explained and had hoped 'Mr. Richard wouldn't consider a liberty.'

The young people were very foolish and very happy. Richard proposed excitements—a walk to see the shops, a visit to the theatre—but Mattie showed no frivolous inclinations, and they decided that they would stay indoors and write to 'mother.'

'Dick, I know I shall make my letters dreadfully badly, because my hand does shake so!' cried the bride.

'Mother will understand,' said Dick. 'Bless you, mother understands everything!'

He got out her photograph, and it stood on the table before them as they penned

the letter, their cheeks touching, Dick's arm round Mattie's waist.

'Begin "My darling mother."'

'Oh, I hope she won't mind!'

'*Mattie*! Wasn't she sweet to you?'

'Yes, dear, only I wasn't your wife then.'

'She knew you were going to be. Go on, darling—you will put it best.'

Mattie's trembling hand wrote quickly,

'We want you to know first. Dick and I were married this morning at St. Neot's Church, Penwey Lane, and we are very, very happy. Of course we are sorry that anyone will be angry, but we cannot help that. God joined our hearts a long while ago, and we could not let anyone put them asunder. We do not know if you will be able to send us just one line, to tell us

that you give us your blessing; for we love you dearly, and are grateful to you for all your kindness.

'We remain, dearest mother,

'Your ever loving children,

'MATTIE AND . . . . .'

Richard added 'DICK.'

Then she looked up and blushed gloriously.

'*You* must write the BROUGHTON, dear wife!' he cried.

CHAPTER XIII.

No. 13, Sandhurst Street, Kensington, was the address of Miss Hilda in London. As she had once confided to Barbara Morne, 'dear Albert' had been an army man, so that the name of the street held a memory for her. Not that she had known him in Sandhurst days, but she had often lived through his experiences in fancy, back to the years of his most interesting babyhood. At least she thought that she had.

'He never had any secret from me,' she

would say, smiling, 'and when he comes home he will have some remarkable accounts to give me.'

Students of the occult would have had reason to bless the name of Albert had he been able to carry out Miss Hilda's prediction.

The house was the property of Miss Hilda's mother, but she was a nonentity, lived in two rooms, never descended the stairs, and was considered by Miss Hilda's friends as a housekeeper who did nothing.

For a long while Barbara had been unable to persuade the little lady that she was of fit age to entertain guests, and pay visits without a chaperon; but when Miss Hilda had learnt to understand the advantages her years entitled her to enjoy she relished freedom thoroughly.

'It is true, love,' she said plaintively,

'that I am not as young as I was, but dear Albert must be older also, no doubt he will have changed more than I have done. I will do my very best to keep as young as possible, that he may not be disappointed when he returns.'

Since the day of Miss Hilda's emancipation, when she had grasped the truth that she was no longer a timid girl who should view the world round a mother's shoulder only, she had been of service to Barbara in many ways.

Miss Morne found the little Kensington house convenient and comfortable for her when she wished to stay in town; while the manner in which her friend received her left nothing to be desired. The Browns were well off now, Mrs. Brown having 'come into money,' and of good will they had a lavish store. The aged

mother was pleased when Barbara found time to pay her a half-hour's visit upstairs,—even a nonentity can smile,—and the daughter took most pleasure in money and home when Barbara could be served by them. The friends Barbara wished to entertain were invited constantly, —by Barbara; Basil—whom Miss Hilda loved as a brother, secretly, but none the less truly—came and went as he pleased.

Miss Hilda had several times begged her dear Barbara to consider the house her own; therefore few people who saw the establishment guessed that the old-young little woman who kept shyly in the corners of the drawing-room was the daughter of the real owner and hostess.

The furniture was old-fashioned but excellent, the dinners served with rare taste. Barbara made the rooms untidy

directly she entered them, but heard no word of complaint.

One night, the end of the day following that of Richard and Mattie's wedding, when the rector and his wife had been six weeks at Rodlynn, a party of men were discussing Anna over their wine and cigars after dinner, in the dining-room of No 13, Sandhurst Street.

Basil Morne was never more at his ease than when playing the host; the part suited him. He would have played it more frequently, had it not needed more capital than he possessed. 'I should be a Cabinet Minister if I were rich,' he once said to his sister.

Only he himself knew how many of his thoughts were devoted to money-making. He risked a great deal, not money only,

but honour, and some danger, in his attempts to become rich.

The wine was of the best vintage. Basil's guests felt friendship for him to-night.

Lord Illworth's son had given the conversation its personal turn.

Basil was laughing.

'She . . . she's a remarkable woman,' said the youth, emphatically. 'Comes from the country, yet isn't at all . . . what do they call it? . . . *gauche* . . . awkward, you know . . . never knew anyone change so much in such a short time.'

'Did you think her *gauche* when you met her in the country, Fred?'

'No; oh no, not at all; by jove, no.'

'She'll make a fine society-woman,' said Jack Aldborough, in his mellifluous voice;

'but the husbands of society-women are always pitiable.'

'Do you mean that a man who cares for society ought to marry a woman who can't hold her own in it?'

'He'd better not marry anyone,' said Aldborough.

They all knew that the speaker wanted to marry Barbara. In society these mute understandings make the points of conversations which seem pointless.

'By-the-bye, Hambleton,' he went on, 'I thought you'd have taken a fancy to the fair stranger; she seems just your sort, a noble, emotional creature whose sympathies might easily be turned upon missionary-meetings and the East End. Miss Morne thinks her friend would suit.'

When addressed, Hambleton looked up. He was the quietest man in the room.

'I have yet to learn that Miss Morne is an infallible judge of character.'

'She writes novels,' said Lord Fred.

'Realistic impossibilities in three volumes of short sentences,' Aldborough sneered.

'You're bitter enough for a critic,' Basil remarked.

'It's the authors to-day who are bitter, in prefaces.'

The men finished their wine and went upstairs, bandying jests with sharp edges, as a juggler throws knives. In the drawing-room the scent of roses greeted them.

Basil noticed the *coup-d'œil* the room presented, for he liked to compare Anna with other women. Those others formed Anna's background in his opinion. Lady Augusta's tow-coloured hair showed Anna's gold to be of truest quality, and Mrs.

Barking's solid figure made Anna's proportions appear perfect in grace. Two young girls sat near her, who had been in the front rank of society ever since they had been christened in a Mayfair chapel, but beside Anna they looked pallid, awkward, plain. They were well-finished, but she was beginning to *live* the life which demands self-assertion.

Lady Augusta had been asking Anna a question, and was exclaiming at her answer.

'I expected you to say that you find town "delightful"; all girls from the country say that.'

'I did not call it delightful,' said Anna.

Her very tone had changed. She had lost her excitement and gained a sense of power. A bright colour was on her cheeks. She had learned to wear white unselfconsciously.

'No, you called it "home-like,"—a most peculiar expression!'

Basil met Anna's gaze, smiling his understanding. That is the most effective air a man can adopt towards a woman.

'I am grateful to town; I should never have known what life is, if I had not come here.' Lady Augusta had moved away, so Anna added softly to Basil, 'You and dear Barbara have been my benefactors.'

As she spoke she drew a long breath, as though drinking in the perfumed atmosphere of the world's pleasure-ground.

'You would enjoy travelling; foreign lands would have a meaning for you they would not have for others. I have to go abroad soon with Lord Illworth; I wish you and Bab would follow me.'

'I shall have to go . . . back to Maycross,' said Anna, sorrowfully.

The word home was seldom on her lips now, for it had lost its meaning. She was utterly subject to new, luxurious influences. Looking back six weeks she saw her old life as a dull routine; her father's favouritism as the result of his desire to make her of service to the parish; the curate's love as a sensible friendship,—there had been no romance anywhere. Her engagement, she told herself, had been entirely due to circumstances. Philip the widower had asked his rector's daughter to marry him, that she might be a mother to his children; she, his parish helper, had known no adequate reason for refusing him.

She wished, now, that she had been born the daughter of some man not a rector.

When she said, 'I shall have to go

back,' she saw the future as it would be, utterly unlike the past. Outwardly there would be no difference, but inwardly her heart would rebel hourly against facts, which had not vexed her before, because she had not discovered them. Her only chance of happiness was opposed to her duty, as she saw it. The old life with the new longings would be misery.

Yet she was grateful to Basil and to Barbara,—especially to Basil,—because they had delivered her from her old self.

'Don't go back,' he said. 'Go down for a little while to see your mother, then come to Bab again. We will show you the world.'

'*This* is the world to me!'

'There are other aspects of it. Why should you consider yourself bound to one dull spot of earth because you spent some

years there? We have an enlightened idea of duty, we worldlings, and hold that the creature is bound to do nothing to check its development. Warped natures are no use.'

'I must go,' Anna answered. 'There is Philip.'

'That was a mistake.'

'If I grant that it was a mistake you must forget after to-night that I did so. But don't you see that I cannot break my promise? Father has always taught me that I must set an example.'

Her eager tone was tremulous.

'So you are to ruin your life for the sake of teaching Jill not to jilt Jack? Taking your point of view, that of a religious Christian, I can see that you will deliberately expose yourself to temptations which no one is strong enough to resist.—Don't

misunderstand me,—I don't mean that you will not be a model wife, but how can you keep your warm sympathies, your womanly tenderness and charity? Every hour, every moment you will be fighting against the knowledge that you have missed your vocation: knowledge of that sort is spirit-killing. After a few years you will be an unhappy, soured woman. I think you the noblest creature I have ever met, yet I dare to predict this. We each have our chance; the man or woman who throws away his or her chance deliberately, can't escape a curse.'

Lady Augusta called shrilly from the other end of the room.

'Mr. Morne! . . . I want to know what you are discussing so energetically with Miss Broughton.'

He looked across at her and laughed.

'The world, the flesh, and the devil, Lady Augusta.'

'Good heavens! what a topic for a drawing-room.'

'A topic which is sure not to be out of place anywhere,' said Jack Aldborough.

Anna was unable to reply to Basil's words; they moved her, she could not forget them. She resolved to think seriously in her bed-room that night, but Barbara prevented this by, dressing-gowned and loquacious, invading her privacy.

'My dear, you're meditating! I'll tell you what the result should be,—you must make up your mind to jilt that curate.'

'I cannot!'

'The word frightens you. I believe a woman would rather die than burn her little finger.'

'I must think . . .'

It was a great admission; he who hesitates is lost. Sometimes a girl's hesitancy means a great loss to a man.

'It's an odious earth, darling!' cried Bab. 'I'm in the blues too; I've been thinking of *him*,—you know who. If he weren't the one man in the world who doesn't approve of me, I would force myself to give him up; but that one difference between him and the crowd is what I love, frankly. If he could tolerate my books he'd ask me to marry him, and because he can't he's my hero. I'm always dreading lest he should yield, and if he doesn't *I* shall have to.'

'Are your books so very bad, Bab dear? I wish you would let me read them.'

'They'd disgust you. Bad? oh, they're only false. My next one is going to be the test; it shall be worse than any of the

others; I shall send it to him, and if he doesn't say it is odious, I will forget him. I don't mean to let any man dictate to me, but I can't love any man who hasn't the strength of mind to do it. I'm a paradox. So is the Earth, and every creature on it! Have you heard to-day from that wretched curate?'

'Why do you call him wretched?'

'Because, with the finest motives, you as his wife will make him so.'

'He has not written for several days.'

'A good thing!'

'Bab,' cried Anna, suddenly, '*I am very unhappy.*'

'Of course you are,' said the novelist-philosopher. 'So am I, so are most women, —so is Basil. We'd better set our wits to work to find some way to comfort one another. You go back to your paupers

and the curate, I marry Jack Aldborough out of vexation, Basil turns into some kind of society-burglar by way of finding excitement; or else, you stay with us and give up the curate, Basil takes us abroad, and I . . . oh, I begin to write for some Gospel papers, and let Mr. Hambleton follow us to Palestine.'

'*Barbara!* You mustn't marry a man you cannot love!'

'Anna, you mustn't marry a curate you can only tolerate! Remember Basil's opinion, that a marriage of duty is as bad as any other marriage of expediency.'

CHAPTER XIV.

The rector and Mrs. Broughton were obliged to change their lodging when they decided to stay in Rodlynn; and though they left strict orders with their first landlady that all letters were to be forwarded at once, it so happened that one letter was delayed for a day and a half.

One afternoon, when the sun-heat was tempered by the veil of a grey haze, and the little sea-side town was without a breeze, Mr. Broughton ordered a dog-cart from the nearest livery stables to take his wife out for a drive.

She had been languid all day; though

he blamed the heat entirely for this, he had become nervously irritable, as he always did when home-affairs were troublesome. Parish matters he expected to find annoying, the effort of bearing with them was one of his priestly duties; but he considered that his family had no right to add other worries to those incidental to his calling. He could not help feeling injured by his wife's suffering, and showed that he felt so.

The dog-cart had soft cushions strapped upon the seats, and the rector assisted his wife to mount to her place, tucking her in with a rug lest she might take a chill, giving her a footstool for her feet.

As he mounted to his own seat—he was going to drive—he looked in her face, with that dissatisfied expression which his

fondness for her prompted, and his fondness for himself increased.

'Of course a drive through the air will do you good, Alice. Do you not admit that it will?'

She had shrunk from the exertion, had wished to stay indoors on the sofa.

Now she smiled at him, and, to spare him contradiction, told a woman's innocent fib.

'Yes, John, dear. I dare say you were quite right, and I was only lazy.'

'There need be no question of exertion,' said the rector, 'you have only to sit still; you may close your eyes if the light hurts them. We shall soon be on the downs, alone together. We will not even talk, unless you prefer to.'

The springs of the dog-cart were not as good as they had once been, so the vehicle jolted up and down-hill,—there was scarce-

ly one level road round Rodlynn,—over stones and ruts. When the grass of the downs was reached circumstances were not much more favourable, for the chalky soil was slippery, and Mrs. Broughton feared the horse might fall.

They had been out about an hour and a quarter, when she asked gently if it would not be wiser to return?

'I shall take you as far as the crest of that hill in front of us,' he answered. 'If there is a breeze anywhere to-day it will meet us there.'

The road up the hill was worse than he had expected, and longer, but he would not yield his purpose.

Drawing up the panting horse on the summit he shaded his eyes with his hand and gazed over the surrounding landscape. No doubt the panorama was grand on a

clear day, but now the sea and all the valleys were covered by a white floating vapour,—the sea-fog so well-known to that coast.

The snowy film formed clouds, wreathed itself into columns, spread out like ghostly expanded hands of dead giants; it wrapped up the few trees in swaddling clothes, and lay two yards deep upon the levels.

As the rector watched it he saw that it was everywhere rising.

Rodlynn, to which they had to return, was shut away from the Broughtons by an opaque wall of moisture. He had not found the breeze he had expected; there was no flush upon his wife's pale cheeks.

'Had we not better get home as fast as we can, John?'

'You need not be afraid of a sea-mist, my dear; you can taste the salt of the

atmosphere on your lips. Salt air and salt water never did harm to anyone.'

'If it becomes very thick, do you think we shall be able to find our way over the downs?'

'At the worst we could always be guided by the coastguard's path; see, there it is—with patches of turf cut out showing the white chalk all the way along.'

'Oh, John! how near it is to the edge of the cliff!'

'Naturally. A coastguard's "beat" is not far inland. Over there to the right are the Seven Hills, you would be able to distinguish them if——'

'John, dear, *do* let us go home?'

'What is the matter? Are you cold?'

'Only a little. The air feels so damp and clinging.'

'You are terribly subject to atmo-

spherical influences, Alice. Half-an-hour ago you were too hot.'

But he turned the horse, and began to wish home were nearer. Going down the hill was easier than crawling up it had been, only the loose stones made the horse stumble. Just as the last yard of the descent was reached the animal almost fell.

The little woman in the trap gave a sharp cry of alarm.

'Don't be foolish, Alice; there is no harm done.'

The rector dismounted, ruefully examined the knees of the horse, which had not escaped injury. It took him some time to find out the extent of the damage; then he patted the creature, and talked to it soothingly.

When he re-entered the cart he saw that his wife had fainted.

Brandy from the flask he had brought revived her after a while, and she began to apologize as soon as her eyes opened.

'It was so foolish of me, John dear, to worry you . . . I am very, very sorry.'

'You ought not to be so nervous. You must know that I shall always take good care of you.'

'Yes, dear,' she said, meekly.

The drive home was surprisingly long. At one time the rector had to walk the horse close by the coastguard path, in and out among the gorse-bushes. And the fog on his face felt like cold fingers.

He was quite chilled when they drove into Rodlynn, but he hoped that his wife had not felt the cold because he had wrapped her up so well. Yet her hand was icy as he took it in his own.

'Will you . . . lift me down, please,

dear John . . . if I am not too heavy?'

The rector was a big, stalwart man, and she the frailest of delicate creatures. Her weight was nothing to his arms. She staggered as he set her on her feet, and clung to his shoulder. He had to carry her into the hall, down the narrow passage, to the sitting-room.

And from that moment she became weaker. The reason for this was inexplicable, the rector said; but so it was. In his own mind he could not altogether repress the thought that poor dear Alice, devotedly fond of her though he was, had never been reasonable. He had loved and cherished her all the more because she was so much his inferior in intellect and strength of character. That evening husband and wife spent together in the little parlour of the lodging-house—she lying

on the horsehair-sofa, her eyes too bright, too wide-open, her voice tremulous when she spoke; he sitting near in the big leather arm-chair, with a newspaper held open before him, and his attention chiefly occupied by her.

He would not let himself be anxious—many brave men are terribly afraid of being frightened—but he did not care to see the look on her face; it was so very deathlike.

He told himself that she was only over-tired, that she would be better after a night's rest, that to-morrow the favourable reaction from fatigue would set in.

'John,' she said, rather late in the evening, 'I do feel so happy, so excited. I wonder if anything nice has happened.'

'My dear, you must not be superstitious. You are beginning to respond to the effect

of the fresh air. Bodily well-being will succeed your mental . . . elation.'

The servant pushed open the door at this moment.

'A young man's just brought round this letter for you, m'am; it was sent to the other house, and Mrs. Smith says she's very sorry but she forgot it somehow.'

'Thank you,' said the rector. He had taken the letter, and now held it in his hand while he studied the writing and the postmark.

'I don't know who your correspondent can be, Alice, for the hand-writing is strange to me, and it comes from London. Shall I open it for you?'

'Please, dear, I . . . I should so much like to open it myself . . . if I may.'

'If you *may*? That is a strange thing for you to say to me, Alice! Have I ever

interfered with your letters, or expressed curiosity regarding them?'

'Oh no, dearest, no, indeed I know you have not. I only wanted the excitement of opening it first,—I get so few letters, you know . . . but please, *please* do it yourself.'

'No, it is yours.'

He gave her the letter and plunged his face between the sheets of the newspaper.

A cry made him look up in spite of his determination not to.

The little woman was sobbing, but not with grief; her face was lit up with a glory of unselfish joy, until it looked angelic in its purity.

Between her sobs she told her news to the man who would not sympathise with her rejoicing. She forgot to fear his anger, forgot everything but that she was the

mother of a son to whom earth's greatest blessing had been given.

'They are married . . . *married!* . . . my own, own boy! . . . oh, God bless him . . . and her . . . for she loves him . . . I have seen her truth in her eyes . . . oh my Dick . . . my darling!'

'You are mad, Alice.'

She met his stern gaze with a triumphant expression and bright smiles; she laughed, though sobs made the laugh a strange one. Her mental elation was carrying her through the ordeal of owning that she had plotted to defeat his will.

'She told me she was going to him . . . but I didn't know it was to be so soon . . . My boy's a husband . . . John, read this . . . don't you understand? . . . you can't separate those whom God has joined together!'

The rector seized Mattie's letter, read it through in a second, tore it across, threw the fragments on the ground and stamped upon them.

From his lips came a curse.

Years ago, as a very young man, he had once let an evil word escape him in a moment of passion, and, for weeks afterwards, had sincerely grieved over the sin, punishing himself by self-imposed crosses. Then his worst punishment had been the knowledge that he had erred, as less worthy men err daily. To-night, after a record of nobly-spent years of toil in his Master's vineyards, he cursed his son, and felt no remorse; the pride which as a young man he had felt the need of curbing, had been justified, in his own opinion, by the undeniable amount of good he had done.

Now he thought it hard that he, of all

men, had been given a son who would disgrace him. If he had been allowed time for reflection he would not have uttered the curse, he would have kept it in his heart; but he could not blame himself that it had been wrung from him.

His wife rose and flung herself on his neck, kissing his stern face.

'John, they loved each other . . . as we do . . . . Don't forget that he is our own, our only boy! . . .'

'Not now, Alice; I have done with him.'

'I shall never, never have done with my son, . . . you mustn't expect that, John. . . . I can't live to comfort him . . . but I shall pray for him and his before the Throne . . . . Oh, dear husband . . . *you* may see his children . . . *I* shall have to wait . . . till they are old perhaps . . .

till God gathers them in! . . . Promise me . . . you will be good to them?'

The rector forcibly detached her clinging arms, and laid her back among her cushions. His face did not relax a muscle.

'This excitement is hysterical, is dangerous. You must control yourself. You give way to morbid fancies, Alice, until you fail to remember that your words pain me.'

She looked up wonderingly.

'Because I said I can't live? John, I think you know that I have felt it a long time. I prayed that I might be allowed to see both my children happy before I had to leave them, and He has answered my prayer. Anna is engaged to Philip,—he is good, a beautiful character,—Dick and Mattie are man and wife . . .'

'You did not pray that you might be spared to *me*.'

'I am such a little piece of your life, John. You know you have often said you wanted to be a clergyman first and a man afterwards. The best of your life you can't lose; I did not think my going would matter so much.'

He mastered himself by a strong effort.

It was heart-breaking to hear her speak so. She did not spare his feelings. She had neglected her duty to him by not praying that she might live for him.

Angry misery was tearing at his heart.

He had invariably done his duty towards her, he was certain of that.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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